WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS OF IBSEN – A STUDY IN THE CONCEPT OF NEW WOMANHOOD

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

ENGLISH

BY

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2006

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **Ms. Mona Mohsin** has carried out her study on "Women Characters in the Plays of Ibsen – A Study in the Concept of New Womanhood" under my supervision for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English of the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. This is her original work and I hope it will add to the already existing literature on Ibsen.

She is allowed to submit the work for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Aligarh Muslim University.

20.4.06

(SYEDA NUZHAT ZEBA)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Dr. (Mrs.) S. Nuzhat Zeba, Professor in the Department of English, for her guidance throughout my research. She helped me by giving very good suggestions in the course of the discussions held. Her approach and methodology in research proved to be a constant source of inspiration to me during the work.

A part of the research material was made available by the former University Librarian the Late Prof. Noorul Hasan Khan of the Maulana Azad Library. I am truly indebted to him and the staff concerned for the valuable help.

My sincere thanks are also due to Professors S. Wiqar Husain, Farhatullah Khan and M.M. Adnan Raza for their encouragement and inspiration from time to time.

Finally I express my deep gratitude to my parents, uncle (Mr. S Z. Hasnain), brother and my two sons, for their inspiration in the research work.

Dated: 20·4·2006

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The roots of Ibsen's dramatic works: A glimpse into personal history

It would perhaps be not out of place to begin this project on Ibsen, with James Joyce's long and glowing review of Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken.* Joyce wrote:

> "Twenty years have passed since Henrik Ibsen wrote *A Doll's House,* thereby almost marking an epoch in the history of drama. During those years his name has gone abroad through the length and breadth of two continents (Europe and America) and has provoked more discussion and criticism than that of any other living man. He has been upheld as a religious reformer, a social reformer, a Semitic lover of righteousness and as a great dramatist. He has been rigorously denounced as a meddlesome intruder, a defective artist an incomprehensible mystic and in the eloquent words of a certain English critic, "a muck ferreting dog". Through the perplexities of such diverse criticism, the great genius of the man is day by day coming out as a hero comes out amid the earthy trails."[1]

Ibsen consistently aroused heated controversies throughout his life and dramatic career. George Bernard Shaw immortalised Ibsen's dramatic genius through his profound thesis, *The Quintessence* of *Ibsenism,* while Strindberg found little to admire in his Norwegian contemporary. Ibsen

seemed least affected by the furore that he caused. "I have always liked storms,"[2] he calmly stated to his sister in 1891.

A study of the life of such an artist as Ibsen, a poet, a philosopher and dramatist of unprecedented talent and genius, reveals those facts and factors which made him the kind of man and artist that he was.

Henrik Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828 in Skien, Norway, a small town about sixty miles south-west of Oslo. He was the second child born to Knud and Marichen Ibsen. Three brothers and a sister were born after him, but Henrik was the only member of his family to show promise.

Ibsen had lived a luxurious life as a child. His father, Knud Ibsen, was a man of ambition and, in order to gain popularity in the social circuit, was inclined to hosting lavish and reckless parties in which he squandered a lot of money. Knud Ibsen was least bothered about the depletion of family wealth which was actually what his wife had inherited from her parents. An extravagant life style, accompanied by little effort at working for the preservation of family fortune and his speculation in salt and timber brought about his financial downfall. When the investments failed, he started mortgaging the family property and very soon the Ibsens were reduced to penury. The family had to move in disgrace to a country house when they lost their financial standing, and Henrik Ibsen bitterly recalled how their friends and relatives, who had once been regular guests at the generous parties of the rich merchant, now refused to have anything to do

with them. In 1836, when Ibsen was eight years old, his wealthy parents went bankrupt.

Although young Henrik appeared quiet and withdrawn, his deep, bitter anger at society in general, and his father in particular would occasionally escape in the scathing caricatures he would draw or in tirades against his young playmates. His sole happiness seemed to come from reading books and putting up puppet plays. Ibsen's mother had been a promising painter before her marriage and the child seemed to have inherited her talent. She had a passion for theatre, too, which again was reflected earlier in the little puppet theatres he put up at home as a child and later in Ibsen's passion for theatre and drama.

It is believed that Ibsen's mother, Marichen Attenburg, was in love with a man called Tormud before her marriage, but she got married to Knud Ibsen as he was chosen by her family. Both of them had grown up together, as Marichen's mother and Knud's stepfather were sister and brother. Marichen was from an affluent family. Her father was a flourishing merchant in the town of Skien where Ibsen's father ran a general store.

Knud Ibsen became an alcoholic out of frustration due to his financial ruin. He turned into a family tyrant, which resulted in violence not only towards his children but also his wife. Halvdan Koht, the author of Ibsen's definitive Norwegian life, notes that "Henrik had ample opportunity to feel his father's heavy-handed insistence on obedience."[3]

Ibsen's mother suffered silently on account of his father's violent behavior towards her. Ibsen's mother was a quiet and submissive soul, and her oppression left a lasting impression on Ibsen's young mind. His sympathy with women same from his understanding of their haplessness and powerlessness in a bad and, more often than not, loveless marriage. Therefore his education in the lop-sided values of an orthodox gender-biased society began at home. Constant financial worries and her husband's dominating nature made Marichen Ibsen so weighed down with melancholy and so subdued that she became aloof and impassive. Ibsen could never forget his father's abuse of his mother and due to his father's attitude he was very passionately and protectively attached to his mother. Reminiscing about his boyhood years in his home town, Skien, Ibsen says that the air "was filled all day long with the subdued roar of Long Falls, Cloister Falls, and all the many other rapids and waterfalls. And the roar was pierced from morning till night with a sound like that of shrieking and moaning women."[4]

Edmund Gosse, his biographer, remarks that the poet's "earliest flight of fancy seems to have been his association of womanhood with the shriek of the saw-mill."[5] If Marichen Ibsen was mute, her son heard women screaming as the quintessential sound of his boyhood town.

Marichen Ibsen loved to paint and draw. Ibsen used to imitate his mother's drawings and paintings. He spent a lot of time with her. Henrik

would make dolls, paint pictures and glue them on to pieces of wood. He had a toy theatre in his own home, which people used to come and see. Henrik moved his scarlet clad stars with the help of the strings much to the delight of his viewers. He also performed as an entertainer to amuse people. These factors - sympathy for his mother's plight and his initiation into the world of drama and theatre through his innocent yet imaginative game of puppets - combined together as some of the motivating forces for him to emerge as a playwright, who wrote more about the rights and sentiments of women, rather than their duties.

Ibsen portrayed his mother's pain and anguish in many of the women characters of his plays: Helene Alving of *Ghosts,* who chooses duty and obligation to stick through a hypocritical marriage; the women of the *Pretenders,* who are instruments of male ambition; the protagonist of *Hedda Gabler, who is* trapped in a loveless marriage. All these women reflect some dimension of his mother's personality.

Ibsen also had doubts regarding his paternity. He came to know from the people in Skien, that his real father was Tormud Knudsen, the man who was in love with Marichen Ibsen. Ibsen who had no respect for his father, due to his tyrannical and hateful behaviour towards his mother, accepted the false rumour as true. He could never escape from his supposed illegitimacy and it was reflected in his writings also. In many of his plays there is an illegitimate or supposedly illegitimate child such as

Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm,* Regine in *Ghosts,* Hedvig in *The Wild Duck.* Ibsen himself also fathered an illegitimate child at the age of eighteen. He had to support the child financially for fourteen years. The mother was a servant girl, who was ten years older than Ibsen.

Ibsen had a great fondness for learning, higher studies and a desire for university education. Unfortunately the Ibsens were too poor to afford such an education, surviving sometimes only on potatoes. So hoping eventfully to study medicine, Ibsen became a druggist's apprentice in Grimstad, a small Norwegian village, at the tender age of fifteen. There he felt like an outsider. He was too non-communicative to make friends. Therefore, he used to read contemporary poetry. Eventually he became friends with a boisterous group of young artists, and he began to write poetry during this time.

By 1848, a spirit of political unrest was sweeping Europe, Rebellions against monarchy flared up in many countries. This spirit of revolution was intoxicating for Ibsen and his friends. Royalty and aristocracy seemed on their way out, the people were coming into their own. Ibsen's poetry written during these years reflects the changing face of contemporary society.

While learning Latin, for university, Ibsen studied Cicero and was inspired by the character of Catiline, the rebellious hero. His first play, a drama in verse, described this deceptive character. However the drama did not get much attention. During his preparation for the entrance

examination, he met his life-long rival and contemporary Bjornstjerne Bjornson, who was to become famous in the future, as the national poet of Norway. When Ibsen was in serious financial strait, Bjornson helped to raise money for him.

Ibsen could not qualify the entrance examination, as he was more involved in creative writing. Theatre was in his blood, and at the age of only twenty-three he got himself appointed director and playwright to a new theatre at Bergen, for which he used to write a new play every year.

Ibsen remained a committed and active nationalist throughout his life. For the first time in centuries, Norway had its own government and was trying to escape the political and artistic influence of Denmark and Sweden. Authors wrote Norwegian sagas, and the Norwegian theatre was opened in Bergen. Young Ibsen became active in Norway's artistic and cultural rebirth. His early plays were filled with sweeping poetry about Vikings and political heroes. The fourteen plays Ibsen wrote between 1850 and 1873 are said to constitute his romantic period.

Ibsen's mother died in 1869. For almost twenty years Ibsen had neither visited Skien nor met his mother for various reasons that he individually told each biographer of his, the most obvious one being that his memories of Skien were very painful.

Ibsen's father died five years later, in 1874. Ibsen wrote in a letter to his uncle, whom he had not seen in twenty seven years, that he had not

written home because he could not help his parents financially. He asked his uncle to thank those who fulfilled "the duties and obligations that I myself should have carried out."[6] He further clarified that, inspite of a strong desire to visit Skien, "I felt strongly disinclined to have any contact with certain tendencies that prevail there, tendencies with which I do not sympathize. A clash with them might have led to unpleasantness, which I preferred to avoid."[7] His dislike and distrust for his father did not abate with time.

Ibsen once wrote to a Danish critic Peter Hansen: "Everything that I have created ...has had its origin in a frame of mind and a situation in my life."[8] Ibsen's understanding and sensitive perception of the plight of the nineteenth century woman, considered a second class citizen, had much to do with his personal life, his intimate relationship with his mother and the women with whom he had close relationships at different points of time. His education in this regard began right at home, where he witnessed a turbulent relationship between a beautiful, talented and devoted mother who came with a lot of inheritance from her wealthy family, and a tyrannical, wifebeating dissolute father who brought much disgrace to the family with his wild ways. Inspite of having everything, Marichen Ibsen, the mother, was powerless at the hands of her husband because patriarchal society had no concern or regard for women except as child - bearing animals or unpaid nurses. Ibsen grew up hating his father and wondering

and debating about his mother's position and her powerlessness. Not only would Marichen Ibsen's pain echo through her son's work in remitting portrayals of suffering women; he would also be motivated to visualize and project women in his plays who would discard the garb of suffering and submissiveness and be able to stand up to injustices of all kinds - the New Woman of his plays. In his plays, Hiordis of *The Vikings at Helgeland,* Helene Alving of *Ghosts,* the protagonist Hedda of *Hedda Gabler* are trapped in loveless marriages; the women in *The Pretenders* are instruments of male ambition; Rita of *Little Eyolf,* Ella and Gunhild of *John Gabriel Barkman* and Irene in *When We Dead Awaken* are deceived and utilized by ambitious men eager for fame.

Ibsen had emotional relationships with several women, each of which left a deep impression on his mind and thinking and helped shape his outlook towards the feminist's cause. He met Clara Ebbell at a local ball, where he fell in love with her. Nineteen – year - old Marthe Clara Ebbell belonged to one of the most affluent families of Grimstad. She was an intelligent and ambitious woman who was also a pianist. Ibsen and Clara read and discussed poetry together. He was fascinated by her loving attention, and she became the inspiration behind many of his later poems. Ibsen referred to her as a "bright star" who is to be adored. He knew about his weak financial status, therefore marriage with her was a dream. He was depressed when he heard about her engagement to the prosperous

Hemming Bie, a ship's captain, who was thirty-eight years old. Bie was Clara's maternal uncle. After this revelation and realization that she could not be his, Ibsen wrote nostalgic poems about death and reminiscences. In *Memories* of a *Ball* dedicated to Clara, the poet calls his love a bouquet of fresh flowers, blossomed in summer and withered in autumn.

Clara was not happy with her engagement to her uncle and broke it in less than a year, in the summer of 1850. She went to Oslo and met Ibsen, who was a student at that time. He showed her his poems, which described their relationship and his state of mind after their separation. Ibsen expressed his experience as a heartbroken lover, whose dreams could not be fulfilled and whose hopes were crushed. When she performed as a Troubadour at a ball, he sent her a poem with the title, "To A Troubadour", in which the poet asks his lover to remain quiet and keep her love in her heart, so that he could feel her love. The poem expresses their love relationship in a very explicit manner.

Clara's uncle loved her sincerely and waited six years for his niece to marry him. But Ibsen could never forget his first thwarted love-affair for the rest of his life.

The episode of Ibsen's first love is very similar to his mother's. Clara and Marichen both had to marry the persons chosen by their parents. Both had to abandon their vocational aims and devote themselves completely to their homes and children. Both women were the perfect examples of

feminine behaviour and also of subservitude.

Ibsen was also very friendly with another woman, Rikke Holst, who was only sixteen, when their acquaintance began. She was impressed with this elegantly dressed theatre man. They spent a lot of time together, and their friendship blossomed into romance. Rikke was intelligent and charming. But her father turned down Ibsen's marriage proposal as he considered him unsuitable for his daughter. After the rejection, Ibsen could not face her and he went far away. Rikke was married to a rich merchant. Ibsen revealed his anguish in many of his poems after his broken love affair with Rikke Holst.

Ibsen was married to Suzannah Thoresen on June 18, 1858. Assertive and independent, Suzannah was a lively person with a flair for the dramatic; she was an avid reader too. Ibsen was favourably impressed and he appreciated Suzannah's honesty and independence. She was an inspiration and model for the strong-willed and independent women characters that he delineated in his plays.

Suzannah was an ideal wife for Ibsen. She was a homely woman, yet smart and efficient in the management of all affairs and did all the work in her house. At the same time she was a literary person with an intellectual mind. She was a paradigm of the new woman for her husband and he loved his wife and called her by the nickname given to her in childhood, "the eagle".

Suzannah stood by the side of her husband during his difficult times. She made life comfortable for him in every possible manner, so that he could write his plays without any hindrance. He preferred the company of his wife rather than friends. He used to spend his evenings at home with his wife and son. Suzannah read English, French, Italian and German classics with great enthusiasm. She was fascinated by nature. She describes Sorrento, where she lived thirty years, ago, while Ibsen was writing *Ghosts.*

> "How carefree one lives there in the warmth and cools oneself everyday in the sea, Take Tancred and little Irene (Bergliot's and Sigurd's children) with you one day and show them where we lived, don't forget. Everyday I climbed up the cliffs in the scorching heat. It was a long climb, but I was lissom and good at climbing them and up there were grasses and wild flowers, The road to Deserto passes by and there is a strange, perfumed atmosphere there, To this day I can smell the scent of roots, herbs and flower on that road to Massa."[9]

Suzannah was a strong willed woman. Their son Sigurd said of the Ibsens: "He was the genius, she was the character - his character - and well he knew it. He would hardly have admitted it except towards the end she knew it all the time."[10] The success and fame her husband achieved during his lifetime was considerably due to Suzannah's support, love and care. Ibsen's relationship with his wife was an ideal one. It owed much to Suzannah's own upbringing and education and the influence of her stepmother, Magdalen Thoresen. Magdalen Thoresen wrote novels and

plays and translated the French plays Ibsen put on as a young stage manager at the Bergen theatre, She was probably the first 'New Woman' he had ever met. She pitied the insolvent young writer, took him under her wing and brought him home, Magdalen Thoresen had passed her strong feminist principles on to her charge, the outspoken and irrepressible Suzannah, who adored her strong-minded stepmother and whose favourite author was George Sand. A couple of times after meeting Suzannah Ibsen asked her to marry him. The fierce Hjordis of *The Vikings at Helgeland* and the strong-willed Svanhild of *Love's Comedy* owe much to Suzannah Thoresen.

Ibsen suffered a stroke in 1900 from which he never completely recovered. A second stroke in 1903 left him paralysed, unable to walk or write. He died on May 23, 1906. Suzannah died at the age of seventy eight, eight years after Ibsen's death. A few days before her death she told her daughter-in-law, about the reason behind her husband's popularity. Bergliot Ibsen records:

> Under great difficulty, she said: "When we were young, many so called friends came to Ibsen, but I got rid of them." And after a long pause: "I was called many names for it, but I took no heed of them - he had to have peace for his work." And after another long pause: "Ibsen had no steel in his character - but I gave it to him."[11]

Ibsen has depicted multifarious women characters in his plays. We see Hiordis' hatred of oppressive domesticity in *The Vikings at Helgeland;*

we witness the dilemma and torment of Inger who had to choose between her child and her vocation in *Lady Inger* of *Ostraat;* we identify with Nora Helmer's rejection of her role as a dolled up beautiful wife in *A Doll's House.* A different image is presented in Mrs. Alving's forced submission into the role of a good Christian wife in *Ghosts,* in Rebecca West's submission to Rosmer's dogma of self-sacrifice in *Rosmersholm,* in Ellida's awareness of the fact that she is an independent individual with a mind of her own in *The Lady from the Sea.* We feel along with Ibsen, that Hedda's rage is justified when she discusses her powerlessness as a woman in *Hedda Gabler.* It is interesting as well as significant that almost all the women characters in Ibsen's plays are opposed to the character and personality of the two women whom Ibsen loved most. It is also interesting to note that the sufferings and humiliations in life can have rather different effects on different people. The same penury that turned Knud Ibsen into an alcoholic, turned his son into a sensitive and great dramatist. Also his personal and family life was largely responsible for the gendered construction of the world that he presents in his plays.

This gendered construction of society has been there in the west since time immemorial. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the editors of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*[12] note, the position of women in western society was always gendered. This rule of men was not enforced by any means of visible coercion, but rather through the

continued reproduction of an ideology that reinforced a separation between male and female roles in society. Tillie Olsen in her article "Silences", specifies further that women in history have always been:

> Isolated. Cabin'd, Cribb'd, confined; the private sphere. Bound feet: corseted bedecked, denied one's body. powerlessness. Fear of rape, male strength. Fear of aging. Subject to fear of expressing capacities. Soft attractive grace: the mirrors to magnify man."[13]

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft published her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), a book well known for its revolutionary portents on woman's role in society. Denying any innate inequality between the sexes except physical strength, she promises to "first consider women in the grand light of human creatures, who in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their facilities."[14]

She addresses women as rational creatures whose "first subject of laudable ambition" should be "to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the destruction of sex." According to her, women must undergo strenuous re-education in order that they might renounce the sensual, rid themselves of "soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment and refinement of taste ... libertine notions of beauty."[15] The single-minded desire to establish themselves is the only way they can rise in the world.

Feminism as a term began to be widely used in Europe as a

synonym for women's emancipation in 1880s. It was the woman's suffrage advocate Hubert Auclert, who first described herself as a 'feminist' in her periodical *La Citoyenne* in 1882 and a 'feminist Congress' was formed in Paris in May 1882 by Eugenie PotoniePierre and the women's group solidarite.

However, apart from liberal theorizing and the formation of feminist groups, there was a considerable amount of popular fiction that debated the pros and cons of the emancipation of women. In this regard one feels compelled to compare two popular novels written during this period. The first was Mrs. Henry Wood's highly melodramatic fiction, *East Lynne* (1861), dramatized versions of which were running in London and New York when Ibsen's *A Doll's House* appeared in 1879. A woman of high birth, Lady Isabel defies convention by marrying beneath her, is then unable to adjust to her husband's ways and suspects him of infidelity and leaves her home with a villainous lover who betrays her. Deserted and penniless, she returns in disguise as a governess to her husband's home and is forced to witness the death of her own son from a severe illness brought on by neglect in the absence of maternal care. Unable to reveal her identity to her family, Lady Isabel collapses and dies of a broken heart, bewailing her fallen state that denied her both social acceptability and peace of mind. *East Lynne* became the manifesto of the conservatives, the staple fare of pulpit oratory.

The other book which was read because it was both controversial and exotic was Olive Schreiner's *Story of An African Farm* (1883). The heroine Lyndall rebels against her status as woman, protesting, not what is done to women, but what is made of them. Lyndall's complaint is about the stringent socialization of women as daughters, wives, mothers, the very fate that Nora of *A* Doll's *House* rejects.

The stirrings of female consciousness, the desire for equality and self-expression were heard sporadically throughout the 19th century. In England it was Elizabeth Barrett Browning whose *Aurora Leigh* (1857) has a female protagonist who defies society to become a major poet. In America, Emily Dickinson became the symbol of women's emancipation through her powerful delineations of a woman's mind and psychology, her rebellion against a gendered world.

"They shut me up in prose
As when a little girl
They put me in the closet
Because they liked me still."[16]

These lines by Dickinson spell out the plight of, and the restrictions placed on, female childhood.

Hence we realize that Ibsen was not the first to raise liberal issues or the 'woman question' in this era though he was certainly one of the most iconoclastic and forceful. Two writers had been especially vocal and forceful during Ibsen's day regarding the cause of women's liberation. One

was John Stuart Mill whose book *Subjection of Women* (1869) was a Bible of sorts for feminists. The other was Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Knut Hansun has called Ibsen "unconsciously a child of Norway of the century and of John Stuart Mill."[17] While M. C. Bradbrook too has claimed that "Ibsen's true place is in the army raised by J.S. Mill and brought up by H.G. Wells."[18]

Not just conventional folk, but major contemporary thinkers and writers as well decried Ibsen's portrayal of the emancipated New Woman, Here a passage from Strindberg's Author's Foreword to Miss Julie is of interest. Strindberg writes of his heroine who is a caricature of the New Woman.

> "Miss Julie is a modern character, the half-woman, the man-hater. The half women is a type who thrusts herself forward, selling herself nowadays for power, decoration, distinction, diplomas as formerly for money. The type implies degeneration... it is not a good type and it does not endure.
>
> The type is tragic, revealing a desperate fight against nature, tragic too in its Romantic inheritance now dissipated by Naturalism, which wants nothing but happiness."[19]

Compared with this kind of vituperation, it is no wonder that *A Doll's House* which considered the type to be spiritually triumphant rather than spiritually barren, became the watchword of the turn - of - the - century women's movement.

In this cause for women's emancipation Ibsen was not only

supported by his wife Suzannah, but also struck a deep friendship with Camilla Collett, one of the most active feminists in nineteenth century Europe and founder of the modern Norwegian novel. Fifteen years before J.S. Mill's *Subjection of Women,* Camilla wrote: *The Governor's Daughter* and brought it out anonymously in two parts. Later on, her authorship became known to the public. Its main argument, based on the general feminist claim that women's feelings matter, is that women should have the right to educate themselves and marry whom they please. Camilla Collett was a regular visitor at the Ibsen's household and Ibsen held many a long discussion with her regarding the contemporary feminist movement. In the years immediately preceding *A Doll's House* Camilla joined hands with Suzannah in urging Ibsen to take up the feminist cause directly.

But the pioneering feminist who most directly influenced Ibsen was Asta Hansteen who had the distinction of being Oslo's first woman portrait painter, the first Norwegian woman to publish in "New Norwegian", the first Norwegian woman to lecture in public. Asta Hansteen's speeches, in which she denounced traditional, theological and social views about women, called forth a storm of abuse. She would also wear men's boots when it rained and carried a whip with her to protect herself against oppressors. She also argued with Ibsen that America was the natural home of women's liberation. American feminism predated the Norwegian movement by forty years and also helped to inspire it. Hansteen spent nine years in the US,

mostly in Boston and Chicago, and during these years she eked out a living painting portraits and writing articles for Norwegian journals. She introduced the sunflower as a symbol of women's right to light and it was adopted as the official symbol of the Norwegian Women's Rights League. During Hansteen's years in America, Norwegian feminism made great strides; the league came into being, along with Gina Krog's *New Ground,* the first Norwegian feminist journal. Hansteen returned to Norway to fight out her battle on home ground.

Ibsen supported the Women's Liberation Movement heart and soul. An incident that took place in the spring of 1879 shows how devoted and committed he was to the cause. Ibsen had made two proposals to the Scandinavian club in Rome; one that the post of librarian be opened to women candidates and second, that women be allowed to vote in club meetings. In the debate on the proposal he made a long speech and finally queried:

> "Is there anyone in this gathering who dares assert that our ladies are inferior to us in culture, or intelligence or knowledge or artistic talent. I don't think many men would dare suggest that. Then what is it that men fear? I hear that there is a tradition here that women are cunning intriguers and that therefore we don't want them. Well, I have encountered a good deal of male intrigue in my life."[20]

Ibsen did not get the support that he had desired, even from the women, and left the place in a cold rage, to return after a few days and

lambaste everyone in a violent manner, declaring the women to be especially contemptible as he had tried to fight for their cause.

> After the publication of *A Doll's House,* Ibsen was hailed by a wide cross-section of the European intelligentsia as a feminist, the champion of the Women's Liberation Movement, the messiah of the suppressed second class citizen. Ibsen himself made a statement regarding this matter on May 26, 1898 at a banquet given in his honour on his seventieth birthday by the Norwegian Women's Rights League. "I thank you for the toast but must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement...True enough, it is desirable to solve the woman problem, along with all the others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of humanity."[21]

The well wishing critics who wished to rescue Ibsen from any labelling of any kind especially a political one, cited these words as proof enough. They argued that despite the propagandist label attached to *A Doll's House* by the feminists, Ibsen never meant to write a play about the subject of women's rights; the conflict represented by Nora is something beyond or more than just a question of her social or marital rights. Much later, in the early years of the twentieth century, Einar Haujer the doyen of American Scandinavian Studies insisted that "Ibsen's Nora is not just a woman arguing for female liberation; she is much more. She embodies the tragedy as well as the comedy of modern life."[22]

This notion about Ibsen's intention in *A Doll's House* being non feminist has become so widespread, especially in the light of the above quoted banquet-speech in his septuagenarian years, that one tends to forget all other facts regarding his deep seated concerns for the cause of women. George Brandes, one of Ibsen's closest associates and probably the critic who understood him best, reports this is not in a discussion of Ibsen's whole hearted support of the women's movement. He explains that although Ibsen had at first little sympathy for feminism, perhaps, Brandes guesses, because of irritation at some of the ridiculous forms the movement assumed, this initial response gave way "to a sympathy all the more enthusiastic"[23] when he saw that it was one of the great rallying points in the battle of progress.

One also has to take into account what Ibsen said at the time when he was planning on writing *A Doll's House*.

> "A woman cannot be herself in the society of today, which is exclusively a masculine society, with laws written by men, and with accusers and judges who judge feminine conduct from the masculine standpoint."[24]

Ibsen's education in the feminist cause therefore was closely intertwined with his socio-intellectual as well as personal perceptions. Woman's emancipation was in the air, one just could not remain untouched by it. Ibsen was surrounded by intellectuals and friends who felt deeply about the cause, especially George Brandes. And then there was his wife

Suzannah Thoresen with whose views and outlook, Ibsen was not only impressed but also moulded to a certain degree.

In 1884 Ibsen joined hands with H.E. Berner President of the Norwegian Women's Rights League, and with his fellow Norwegian writers, Bjornson, Lie and Kielland in signing a petition to the Norwegian Parliament urging the passage of a bill establishing property rights for married women. He fervently hoped and worked for the success of the campaign for women's right to vote. And yet, Ibsen refused all his life to be claimed by any political party or group or organization. He was a visionary with a poet's free soul.

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Chapter II

Ibsen, the Playwright

Henrik Ibsen, it is unanimously agreed, was the founder of modern drama, the leader of the group that brought the "theatre of revolt"[1] as Brustein calls it, into existence. To him is given the credit of inventing the realistic prose play and of making the theatre a forum for debate. The last couple of decades of the nineteenth century were at all levels, social, political and intellectual, a critical phase in England and Europe. The attention of the intellectuals and the writers was focused on contemporary problems and issues. Martin Lamm has aptly remarked, "Ibsen's work is the Rome of Modern Drama; all roads lead to it and away from it."[2]

In order to assess the importance of Ibsen as the pioneer of modern drama, his modernism, his preoccupation with contemporary problems and above all, his views on women and their status, which is our main concern in the present study, we need to make a brief survey of the drama of the past and the new drama of the late nineteenth century, which threw into focus a number of iconoclastic playwrights, chief among whom was Ibsen.

The Drama of the past was dominated by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Marlowe and Racine. In their works traditional stories and myths were presented before an audience that was safely ensconced in a

gradually changing but still tradition bound society and times. Then came a bleak period in the history of drama when a marked decline set in. In the post-Shakespearean period we had dramatists like Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and the Jacobeans who produced a large bulk of drama, but much of it lacked in potential dramatic qualities. This decline continued throughout the Romantic period. The first half of the nineteenth century was especially a very barren period, where theatre had become almost extinct. The drama of the nineteenth century was superficial grappling with human issues, contemporary or otherwise. Beneath the radiant surface of growing industrialization host of issues pertaining to social, economic and spiritual spheres were simmering and brewing. It was at this point of history and time that Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, emerged as the one who was to liberate and raise drama from its sorry state and to make it an instrument for bringing about revolutionary changes in European society. Raymond Williams therefore, rightly regards him as the "consciousness of modern European drama."[3]

With Ibsen begins what we popularly believe to be the movement called 'the theatre of revolt' against the moth-eaten, decaying values and traditions, social, intellectual and literary of the nineteenth century. Earlier, Browning had declared in his poem, Pippa Passes:

"God's in his heaven----
All's right with the world;"[4]

reflecting the spirit of an age which still confirmed its traditional values and culture, but just on the surface. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment were simmering for a long time and it was Nietzsche, who influenced the movement of revolt in all spheres of life, and particularly in literature by declaring the death of God and hence spiritual bankruptcy. He pointed out that the death of God had occurred despite the lip service paid to Him by a civilization still nominally Christian. Hence he was able to detect the secret wound of contemporary times which time itself at that juncture did not wish to acknowledge. Under his influence a significant number of contemporary writers and dramatists began to question the existence of God, the validity of the church and religion, the importance of values and ideals and indicated the rights of the individual against the claims of morality, convention and rules. The writer thus became a rebel. A radical break is made with the past in mid-nineteenth century, in regard to values and traditions. This is seen in the field of drama by playwrights like Ibsen in Europe and Shaw in Britain. Modernism can be attributed to numerous factors. Ibsen's first step, and a much needed one was to free drama from the clutches of vaudeville and melodrama and make it a realistic portrayal of society. Realism as a movement, which had germinated in the works of Flaubert and Balzac, was not only a reaction against Gothic romances, picaresque adventure and allegorical fantasy but also against accepted norms and conservative morality. Ibsen not only adopted the realistic mode

of presentation in his prose plays, but also refined it in theme and content. Most importantly he was the first dramatist to relate drama to contemporary social problems. Ibsen adopted the technique of the well made play, and cast aside the older method of presentation, that is exposition, use of soliloquies, the presence of a chorus, and abolished the ancient five act division. Thus what was mechanical in the earlier realistic drama was made organic. His terseness of form, combined with an economy of means, the precision of his carefully-worded stage directions and his in-depth study and portrayal of the middle-class make him a dramatist of unprecedented talent and power and insight.

But Ibsen is considered a modernist, not only because he pulled drama out of the abysmal depths of melodrama and sentimentalism, but because his drama is essentially a drama of rebellion, and a messianic revolt is the first step towards it. The major issue of messianic drama is to change old traditions and to transform the life of man. 'Messianic' is derived from 'messiah' which means a person who conveys a message. He talks of the independence of man from the shackles of orthodox society. As a messianic playwright Ibsen wants to bring about a revolution in society through the message he conveys. He removes the upper crust of the nineteenth-century, bourgeois, European society which was based on hypocrisy and traditional values. The change in society is to be effected through the portrayal of characters in a given, specific situation. Ibsen, for

example, places his characters against such backgrounds as to make them act and react in a definite and decisive manner. His plays depict the life of common middle class men and women with everyday problems of an individual in a simple language. Social revolt is thus the core of modern drama. In Ibsen's plays the focus is primarily on revolt and rebellion. Ibsen's radicalism includes a psychological strain as his revolt against the existing order is essentially an individual revolt. It is his near obsession with the problematic and the contemporary that makes him so overwhelmingly modern. He has as the critic Michael Egan says, "...energized the banal settings of the Victorian bourgeois face, he dared to write 'drawing room tragedies'. His generic antecedents were not Shakespeare or Racine, they were Scribe and Sardou remorselessly, frighteningly modern. Ibsen for the first time, portrayed on the stage a contemporary tragic middle-class."[5] The critic further remarks, "what accounted for Ibsen's acceptance and popularity as a playwright was that he was presenting situations in his plays that were purely contemporary in nature, his central characters always plucked from the middle class that he too belonged to and hence in their travail profoundly disturbing."[6] And furthermore, these central characters, be they men or women

> "opposed or were opposed by, a modern world; in Ibsen society replaced Nemesis as the tragic face, crushing individual expression ... His protagonists did not move .. in an obsolete feudal world. He broke free from

> the traditional tragic mode, a mode unable to conceive of the genre without a prince at its centre, by liberating it from the supremacy of Attic, Elizabethan and neo-classic drama or rather broke into it by mining the auriferous vein of European social comedy and transforming its emphasis, he created the tragedy of manners."[7]

In dealing with the problems and specific social situations of nineteenth century Europe, Ibsen shattered all the existing notions, beliefs and mores of the middle class, which loved to passionately hold on to their orthodoxy and prejudices and did not in the least wish to be contradicted in its beliefs and assumptions. Drama and theatre of the time, likewise was based on stock situations and predictable responses. Ibsen offered a different prospective altogether.

The issues that he took up for discussion in his plays were diverse and often touched upon subjects that were anathema to the nineteenth century mind. His insidious attack on traditional morality, for example had a firmness of purpose because he felt that it was this needless adherence to outdated ethical mores that was perniciously gnawing into the fabric of society and hindering its progress. As Eric Bentley says, "calling attention to the rotten bottom of ships, the subjugation of Victorian wives, the ravages of syphilis and the corruption of municipal politics and journalism. (Ibsen) made himself the father of the reformist drama of the end of the century."[8]

Robert Brustein also defines Ibsen's role as a reformer when he lists, "divorce, euthanasia, (and) cures for syphilis alongside issues of women's rights", "social amelioration" and "political reform" associated with Ibsen's work."[9] Thus we see that Ibsen's plays, after the first phase, where he wrote extravagant epics celebrating man in nature, are social dramas with prosaic - seeming forms; they are acts of rebellion in disguise. Increasingly he seemed to take on the attitude, or the assumed pose of a veiled prophet. Without actually explaining his own plays or committing himself to any public questions, without joining a party or participating in any movement, he was able to bring about a tremendous revolution in the nineteenth century attitudes and outlook. He made people sit up and take notice of what he had to say in *The Pillars of Society* (1877) he was a social reformer with a simple yet specific message - that the rich and powerful are often selfish and corrupt. Though this was yet it was not too novel an idea, yet presented with much earnestness. The playwright now commits himself for the rest of a long and prolific career to the prose drama of modern life, grappling with problems and specific issues and situations that were a malaise for nineteenth century society.

The Pillars of Society was a landmark in that it introduced modern theatrical realism on the European stage. It was also a landmark in Ibsen's dramatic career because from now on the playwright committed himself to the genre of prose drama embodying his social vision of modern life. It was

followed by *A Doll's House* (1879) where he "confronted the audience with a new conception. Woman was no longer to be the shadow following man ... a 'skin-leka' attending man, but an independent entity, with purposes and moral functions of her own."[10] Nora of *A Doll's House* becomes the symbol of the emancipated New Woman and her bold step of slamming the door shut on a life which she feels has crushed her individuality, unleashed a serious debate in Europe as to the place and role of woman in society. This play was followed by *Ghosts* (1881), where "the working of individuality by hereditary weakness, caused by selfish indulgence" is the central tragic theme. With the publication of *Ghosts,* Ibsen came to be recognized as an author who would not be discouraged by conventional secrecy in assessing the moral health of his society. "His purpose here was to demonstrate how a series of withered conventions, unthinkingly perpetuated, could result in the annihilation not only of a conventional family but by extension the whole modern world."[11] His next play *An Enemy of the People* (1882) is infused with a 'naive dynamism and energy' which is not really a marked feature of Ibsen. This was his polemical work, considered by many as a revolutionary pamphlet, where the hero, Stockman seems to be echoing - ... "Ibsen's private convictions about the filth and disease of modern municipal life, the tyranny of the compact majority, the mediocrity of parliamentary democracy, the cupidity of the conservatives and the hypocrisy of the liberal press."[12] This play marked a

transitional phase in the career of Ibsen, when incensed and hurt by the ruthless attacks on *Ghosts* he wanted to take a breather and write something different and idealistic. It may also be that Ibsen was gearing up for a more vigorous and direct expression of his radical beliefs and ideas that were to follow. He navigated his way to this new phase through the presentation of *The Wild Duck* (1884), a play about "broken, frustrated people, the family members of Gregers Werle, who have forgotten their natural life."[13] The play's newness lies in the way the wild duck is used not only as a symbol but also as an instrument which controls the plot and action, and reveals and defines characters.

The Wild Duck was followed by a strikingly new play *Rosmersholm* where Ibsen declared "that new faith, modern ideas in ethics and religion, cannot, with safety be put in old bottles. Opinions may perforce be altered, but the hereditary tendency remains, paralyzing the will."[14] Through the characters of Johannes Rosmer and Rebecca West he presents two diametrically opposite worlds. These two people who are absolutely different in nature and personality come together and play out a drama of love, fatal attraction and ultimate destruction. The play is subtle, rich and complex in its presentation, where the pull between the conservative world and the modern, leads to a grim tragedy.

In *Hedda Gabler* (1890) too, the same adherence to traditions and ethics of a particular class, the military class, to which Hedda belongs,

brings about her tragedy. In *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen portrays a self-centered, selfish and sensitive woman in the form of Hedda, who has no counterpart in the real world.

Coming to the last phase of his dramatic career, we can pick yet another masterpiece, *The Master Builder* which shows the genius of Ibsen the modernist. The play centers round the life of a prosperous architect, Harvard Solness, whose one passion is to build Churches. But unable to find any reward in this endeavour, he

> " .... recklessly defies the Great Builder, and becomes himself a Free Builder; to shape his life after his own fashion; only to find that he is clogged by chains everywhere,-chained by marriage to a dead wife, chained to a living conscience which he cannot kill, still, the impossible, the idea of an impossible happiness on earth beckons him on; and in his last desperate effort to attain it... he is crushed forever."[15]
>
> Ibsen seems to be declaring through this play that "there is no good on earth ... its conventions and morality are equally rotten and useless,- neither beyond the earth is there any happiness."[16]

Hence one comes to believe and understand, after a study of Ibsen's plays that his art, is as Arthur Symons has succinctly remarked,

> ...of that essentially modern kind which is not content with holding the mirror up to nature, but desires to drive in certain reformatory ideas over and above the impression conveyed by an impartial reflection of life ...The power of work... is in this; that his purpose thrusts him itself into the very midst of humanity, forces him to know men and women as they are. to

> describe them as they are, and thus to base his art on the only unshifting basis- (his characters) are types, yet never abstractions-rather living men and women who reflect ideas ...Ibsen's grip on his subject matter is prodigious and his subject matter is modern life-like and the abuses of life."[17]

Ibsen's desire, aim and purpose in writing such dramas is to underline and often satirize everything that is redundant, decaying or moth-ridden in society, at all levels, be it political, social or personal.

> "His fundamental demand is for individual liberty; he would have men live according to nature and he can conceive of a reasonable society only as an organization founded on the truth of things and bound together by sincerity ...his plays.. are but a gospel of real light; they illuminate, they do not argue."[18]

As for the label of idealism, Ibsen does not qualify for it because he is too "steadily practical, full of common sense, shrewdness; attention to fact, to detail."[19]

IBSEN'S MODERNISM and THE CONCEPT OF NEW WOMANHOOD

Ibsen's modernism is closely connected or rather entwined with his is attitude towards the 'woman-question;' his deep understanding of the problems of women and his presentation of the concept of New Womanhood. Among the host of problems of the nineteenth-century society that he put to debate in his plays the Issue of the status of women

how it was, and how it should has prime significance. And why not? It was the burning question of the day.. Woman's status in society, woman's right to franchise, woman in relation to man-these issues had occupied the mind of many a thinker and artist. The nineteenth century European society, being of a rigidly, almost perversely patriarchal nature, gave rise to a host of problems where 'woman' was the biggest casualty. It was a society riddled with double" standards; while unquestioned freedom was the lot of the fortunate men folk, women were denied choices in life. Even their social and familial behaviour was determined by the codes of patriarchy. This matter was taken up by several sensitive writers. The German playwright Hauptmann discussed and debated the issue of women's rights in *The Sun Rise* (1889) and stressed the need for compatibility and equality in the choice of marriage partners. Wedekind ruthlessly exposed the corruption rampant in the sexual ethos of patriarchy, in his plays *Spring's Awakening (1891), Earth Spirit* (1894) and *Pandora's Box* (1898). In France, Brieux wrote plays on the double standards and commodification of women In *The Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont* (1898) and on the evils of forced motherhood in *Maternity* (1903). In England, George Bernard Shaw was on the war path regarding the status of women and put a variety of the 'New Woman' on the stage in notable plays like *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), and *Candida* (1894). We find the same exposition of the double standards of life especially in relation to

women in the plays of Oscar *Wilde; Lady Windermere's Fan,* (1892), *A Woman Of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). Hence we see that the 'women-question' had prime importance for the exponent of modern drama. It was a very demanding and all-absorbing issue in the late nineteenth century European context, and modern European drama has emerged and developed hand-in-hand with this issue.

The social climate of the 1890s must be considered as perhaps a partial explanation for the interest and projection of the New Woman; this was the age of movements for women liberation from the centuries-old constraints that denied them opportunity in political social and economic fields. A conflict between the sexes was underway in the public world and the theatre could hardly remain untouched by its rising passions. Those passions found their focal point in the persona of the woman who dared to stand up against conventional female roles and thereby threatened the fabric of society. Many of Ibsen's female protagonists fall into this category and the character of Nora of *A Doll's House* is a case in point Ibsen's radical views on most social and political subjects, especially the 'woman-question' inspired a number of writers in England and Ireland as well as the European continent to write along the same lines. George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Wing, Pinero and Henry Jones followed Ibsen's lead.

George Bernard Shaw, among the three mentioned above is, after

Ibsen, the most significant advocate of the New Woman concept. He despised the image of the good, conventional, womanly woman, because she fulfilled the prescribed role of loyal wife and did not attempt to overreach her position in society show, whose natural morality should be seen as arising out of the period's intellectual commitment to reshape society with complete rationality, honesty and freedom of thought, sought, like Ibsen to present an image of woman who was to be free from such stereotypes as dependency and weakness; hypocrisy and false modesty. As early as *Mrs. Warren's Profession* the indication of it all is there.

"Women have to pretend to feel a great deal that they don't feel ... But I can't stand saying one thing when everyone knows another. What's the use in such hypocrisy?"[20]

In the same play, Vivie is described as

"....an attractive specimen of the sensible, able, highly educated young middle class English-woman. Age 22. Prompt, strong, self-possessed, plain business-like dress, but not dowdy."[21]

Vivie is in the image of the New Woman, in her masculinity, in the rejection of her sexuality, in her independent outlook. Shaw goes further in his delineation of the New Woman in *Arms and the Man* and *Candida.* In the former the women want to be on an equal footing with the men. Raina claims to be braver than Bluntschli, Louka taunts Sergius by saying that she has more courage than he has. Raina is shown to have more spirit

and vitality than Sergius. She does the one truly brave act in the play by saving Bluntschli. Both Louka and Raina are said to pursue their future mates actively whereas the men appear passive and unaware that the women have designs on them. Each of the women is a strong character. Shaw highlights this quality of common sense in women and sees them as in many ways stronger than men.

Shaw does not idealize women. The women in *Arms and the Man* lie, spy, eavesdrop, provoke quarrels and use any means available to succeed. If Shaw shows women as equal to men, he also shows the New Woman as stripped of the protection in which society has usually shrouded and idealized the female sex. For Shaw equality includes the emancipation of men from conventional protective attitudes towards women. Bluntschli, for example, is rude to Raina when he accuses her of continually lying. He is also aware throughout the play that Catherine uses lies to gain what she wants. Shaw does not condemn such behaviour in women; he even seems to admire it as showing vitality and life.

Henry Arthur Jones', *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) may also be considered a significant playas regards its projection of the image of the New Woman. Jones' Lady Susan Harralein snaps her fingers at her husband, asserts the meaninglessness of marriage, and proves it by having an affair. Such an act of defiance though, very much like Nora's in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* on the surface, but actually lacking in Nora's

motivation, results in a one-dimensional classification of the New Woman. In the same play we have the other view too in the words of Sir Richard Kants, who stands for the Orthodox Code, the patriarchy, the establishment of the nineteenth century.

Sir Richard Kants comments on the New Woman.

> "There is an immense future for women as wives and mothers, and a very limited future for them in any other capacity. While you ladies without passion or with distorted and trumpeting allover the country, that wise, given old grand mother of us all, Dame Nature is simply laughing up her sleeve and snapping her fingers at you and all your new epochs and new movements ...go home! Nature's darling woman is a stay at home woman."[22]

Pinero, once again projects the same type of defiant women who challenge the sexual mores of conservative society. Agnes in *The Notorious Mrs. Effsmith* delivers one of the hardest blows to the institution of marriage by choosing to live with a man and dares to justify her action. Paula Tanqureray, in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), is young, beautiful, willful with a post, who commits suicide because she realizes that even marriage to a respectable men cannot erase the label that orthodox society has given her. Such is her plight and predicament that she breaks and commits suicide. Though Pinero and Jones glorified and treated their women with great sympathy, yet these women had not received a good response from the readers and audience.

Ibsen's importance and significance as the father of modern drama also therefore rests on the fact that he took up the matter of women in society in his plays in an honest and sincere manner, without making a hue and cry about it, or giving it a political or feminist twist. Once again he was particularly and peculiarly qualified for this job for notably two reasons: one, his own personal and family experiences and two, his innate genius In presenting his concept of women as full, independent, moral beings struggling against the social and cultural norms that define and limit them. Taken as a whole his plays constitute a remarkable literary contribution to the study of feminine nature and behaviour and his concept of New Woman hood which he feels is necessary for bringing about the reversal in the fate and fortune of the oppressed and suppressed women.

It is this role model of the dutiful submissive woman that Ibsen wants to abandon and repeatedly subverts in his plays, thus creating women characters who sometimes successfully and sometimes not so successfully try to break their shackles - in the character of the frustrated Hiordis who hates her shattered domesticity *(The Vikings at Helgeland);* in Svanhild; unhappy capitulation to her society demand that she marry suitably *(Love's Comedy);* in Nora Helmer's refusal of the servicing identities conferred on her by her husband *(A Doll's House)* in Helene Alving's fatal compliance with her Christian duty as a wife *(Ghosts),* in Rebecca West's submission to Rosmer's dogma of self-sacrifice

(Rosmersholm); in Ellida and Bolette Wangel's marriages of reason and in Ellida's realization that she possesses an autonomous self *(The Lady from the Sea);* in Hedda's rage against her powerless woman's condition and in the self-denying servitude of her foils, Julia and Thea *(Hedda Gabler);* in Aline Solness's morbid devotion to her mother's duty *(The Master Builder);* in Rita Allmers' discovery that she has a self apart from her relation with a man *(Little Eyolf);* in Gunhild and Ella's obsessions with their identities as mothers *(John Gabriel Barkman);* and in the model Irene's censure of her servitude to an artist *(When* We *Dead Awaken).* The lives of these women, as portrayed by Ibsen, serve a distinct purpose: to protect against the life that his mother and symbolically the majority of nineteenth century women lived. The greatness of Ibsen In advocating the cause of the New Woman lies in the fact that he translates and transforms his personal experiences and relationships into a universal experience, the experience of the maltreated suppressed woman and helplessly caught up in an unfair patriarchal society. Throughout in his plays he gives us images of women who are dominating, headstrong, capable individuals and certainly not the weaklings that they are often made out to be.

It is important to note that nowhere, in the entire gamut of women characters that Ibsen has presented, does the playwright address the 'role' of women in society, nor does he consider them as 'problematic' or 'problems' that have to be put right unlike rotten ship bottoms, syphilis,

pollution and economic disparity; women are not taken up in his plays as 'problems' but human beings, free, thinking, rational human beings. Their function in society does not need to be defined to take the most significant and powerful example. Nora in *A Doll's House* refuses to embrace the role society has determined for her and inspite of her husband's declaration (who is the mouthpiece of contemporary orthodox society) that "Before all else you are a wife and mother."[23] asserts her autonomy; "I believe that before all else I am a human being."[24] It is this insistence of Ibsen on women as autonomous, free-thinking beings which makes him the standard bearer of modernism and it is this that makes him study, analyze and present women as he feels they ought to be and function in society, in the model of the New Woman. In presenting this paradigm Ibsen intends to tear apart the false virtues of submissiveness, loyalty, duty, sacrifice etc. that society has forced women to project, and come out as free, natural, spontaneous and unfettered as men.

In the plays that have been taken up for discussion in this thesis it has been a sincere endeavour to make a study of some of those women characters who by virtue of their distinct individuality or by their meaningful actions in given situations in their lives conform to Ibsen's idea of the New Woman in the Western society where for a long, long time the idea of a lady was closely bound up with the image of Mary and the code of conduct that society ordained for women, a women who transgressed the line even

slightly was considered 'fallen'. There was this constant tension between the idealized image of a lady who was pale, fragile, ethereal, pious and submissive and the "fallen women", the whore. Nothing existed in-between. A woman who was spontaneous, natural in her behaviour, given to asserting herself and determining her own course of life, full of the weakness and foibles that make up human nature was not to be taken into account. It is in this kind of a gendered society, that Ibsen shows us a different picture of the woman. He understands the complexity of their nature, emotions and the secondary position that they have been relegated to in society. He shatters the patriarchal ideology that reinforces a separation between the image of men and women in society, and persistently gives us images of women who can hold their own in all kinds of situations because they too have a rational mind and freewill. His New Woman is one, who is neither all-good nor all-bad, but a curious combination of both with a powerful will to project and propel herself towards a future that she desires, and above all, not wanting to succumb to pressures of a patriarchal system. How many of them succeed in doing so, is not really the fame of reference, but the way they put up a resistance is what matters.

The image of woman that emerges in his plays is that of an emancipated woman who is able to think with her own mind, and this is evident right from *The Vikings* at *Helgeland.* Much of the mind of bourgeois

Europe was made up of outdated attitudes and opinions, some thing that was quite inappropriate for the new individual. The society thrived on old values and traditions where duty to oneself was not important. People believed that man could lead a good life only if he suffered in true Christian spirit. Ibsen changed this attitude with great courage of conviction. He said that duty to oneself was one of the supreme and fundamental duties. His characters are different from other playwrights of the nineteenth century because they are individuals who think of themselves too and both men and women in his plays attach a lot of importance to their status and role in society. Ibsen's focus is more on the woman in society because he was convinced that the woman was really suppressed and deprived of all rights and dignity. He has written about the rights of women rather than their duties. He believed that since a woman too has a mind of her own, she should be able to take decisions individually and should get freedom in every walk of life in a male-dominated society. Ibsen was very conscious of the status of women in the nineteenth century society. His characters, particularly women are always in search of an identity, an individually, a space which they can call their own.

Ibsen's Nora of *A Doll's House* is impulsive, highly imaginative and very much inclined to go to extremes. Once a submissive wife, she leaves her home, when she realizes that her husband treats her like a doll-wife and tells him, "I believe that that first and foremost am an individual, just as

you are or at least I am going to try to be; know most people agree with you. Torvald, and that they say so in books. But henceforth I can't be satisfied with what most people say, and what is in books I must think things out for myself, and try to get clear about them."[25]. Nora gives voice to the most basic of feminist principles, that women no less than men possess a moral and intellectual character and have not only a right but a duty to develop it.

Nora and Helmer are the bourgeois version of the pan cultural ideal of marriage as a relation of natural superior inferior, in which the wife is always under the influence of her husband. *Doll's House* is a typical Ibsen play, a drama of disguise and concealment, where, the suspenseful revelation of the past reveals character by exposing appearances and lies. Buried in Nora are an intelligence, and courage, and a pride in accomplishment that make her doll-identity absurd and demeaning, that prove that her brain is not an organ of her sex. Ibsen overturns the conventional roles of the bourgeois couple, as the sheltered, feeble wife proves to be a resourceful masculine life-provider in the most literal way, saving her husband from dying, and the protective, strong husband, turns out to be a fainthearted, feminine weakling. It is her husband's betrayal that forces Nora to examine their marriage, pronounce it counterfeit, and transform her relation to "the world out there".

The universality of *A Doll's House* does not come from "its demand

for truth in every human relation", but in its demand for equality in the relation between women and men. It is based on the general conflict of men and women, morals and Instinct, in a manmade society. Nora represents a truly emancipated woman who is in search of an identity. In the first act of the play she is seen as a loving mother and a submissive wife. She saves her husband's life by borrowing money from Krogstad. Later on when Helmar comes to know the fact regarding the money, he becomes furious and calls her a hypocrite and a liar. Firstly she was under the shadow of her father and after marriage she is under the influence of her husband. Nora is an epitome of The New Woman. She is an emancipated woman but in a positive sense.

When Nora decides to leave her home, husband and children, she represents the picture of an emancipated woman. As Clement Scott says,

> "This is the ideal woman of the new creed; not a woman who is the fountain of love and forgiveness and charity, not the pattern woman we have admired in our mothers and our sisters, not the model of unselfishness and charity, but a mass of aggregate conceit and self-sufficiency, who leaves her home and deserts her friendless children because she has herself to look after."[26]

Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* is a development upon the character of Nora in *A Doll's House.* She chooses duty and obligation to stick through a

hypocritical marriage only to realize that it has made a ghastly mockery of her entire life. She has been all her life under the domination of a pestilent spirit of self-will.

Mrs. Alving is the tragic protagonist of the play. Before her marriage she was in love with Pastor Manders. She makes the tragic choice of being guided by the Pastor's advice and stay on with her dissolute husband. She suffers on account of this choice, but she does not give in and continues, all her life, to strive for liberation from the hell that her life has been with each new situation. Mrs. Alving's struggle seems to head towards a tragic end.

Mrs. Alving is presented as a dual personality. Theoretically she is an emancipated woman but practically she represents the image of a suffering woman, who is accepted in a conventional and orthodox society. As Clement Scott says,

> "Mrs. Alving stands out from the rest because she is human. This is the one conventional character in the play. We are attracted to her because she is not an egotist, because she is not always whining about herself, because she suffers nobly in silence and with dignity. Ibsen makes an attempt to convert Mrs. Alving to Ibsenism, but he soon gives it up. There is a wild idea of making her a mouthpiece of free-thinking, but the master thinks better of it."[27]

Mrs. Alving with her conventional respect for marriage, inspite of a dissolute husband, is the tragic antithesis of Nora. She

stays on inspite of everything in a loveless marriage which was very common In the bourgeois homes of Europe. Much has been said and discussed at length about the dramatic projection of Hedda. As Clement Scott comments on her,

> "In *Hedda Gabler* he gives us a typical tragedy of modern life, and in the strange, sensitive, selfish heroine, he presents one of the most wonderful and subtle conceptions of woman in the whole range of dramatic literature. But though we hate his self-centered woman, with the bored, unsatisfied life, who fights like a cunning tigress wounding and, killing without pity, to gain the emotional and sensuous food she hungers for, with what a thrilling sense of pity and terror must we regard the fatal consequences of her spoiled life."[28]

But Ibsen in his effort to project the New Woman, shows us the image of woman in all her multifaceted ness, the various dimension of her personality as opposed to the accepted image of woman as docile, innocent and as was depicted in nineteenth century literature. Hedda Gabler, an aristocratic and spiritually hollow woman makes an independent decision about her life. Women, however, in all but the most progressive societies, are barred from participating in the world outside their families. Thus, Hedda Gabler, despite a profound craving for independence, has no personal resources with which to realize self-responsibility. Not having any positive influence in the world, Hedda Gabler can only define herself negatively. She destroys what she cannot accept; undermining her

pregnancy, destroying Thea's life work, burning Loveborg's creative product, ruining the child manuscript and finally committing suicide. In fact all these are her perverted attempts to satisfy her "craving for life": By depicting the pathology of a frustrated woman in Hedda Gabler, Ibsen declares his most powerful protest against the double standards of nineteenth century society.

Hedda is an icon of a typical dominant woman. She thinks that it is intolerable to be everlastingly in the company of one and the same person. She wants to have a relation outside marriage with Brack as a trusted friend. She runs away from the responsibilities of married life. She was the first woman egoist Ibsen had portrayed, conventional, intelligent and sensitive, more male than female in many ways, "she as a personality is more to be conceived as her father's daughter than her husband's wife."[29]

The play *The Lady* from the *Sea* advocates the dictum that freedom combined with responsibility leads to the right direction. The female protagonist Ellida Wangel is a true picture of a bold and emancipated woman,

> "Ellida is a Nora who does not go out and does not bang the door but she is far more poetic creature than Nora. She also has lived for many years with a strange man, She has borne a child to him, she has accepted the duties and responsibilities of a wife, and after six years she seems to want a change, and talks wildly of a mystic marriage with a seafaring murderer, and makes up her mind that she can not live with

> a man who does not come from the sea and talk of seals, and Kittewakes, and dolphins, and porpoises, and she is bored to death by a Scandinavian doctor."[30]

The struggles of Ibsen's women in a world that deprived them of full human lives dramatize a battle between worn-out doctrines and principles and the rebellious impulses of a new world beginning to be born. Ibsen was the kind of genius commonly believed to be ahead of his time because he saw the future in the present. These women of the end of the nineteenth century, fighting against assumptions as old as recorded time, are the fullest embodiment of Ibsen's modernism and his concept of New Womanhood.

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Chapter III

The Primitive Woman

The three plays grouped here for discussion are *Catiline, The Vikings at Helgeland* and *Love's Comedy.* The latter two belong to that period in Ibsen's dramatic career, the romantic and historical when his mind was focused on the early annals of his own country, those powerful Scandinavian sagas that tell a tale of love war, passion and revenge. These myths and stories served not only as a powerful thematic background, but also provided Ibsen an opportunity to portray characters which were consumed by great passions, and especially women characters who stand out by virtue of their fiery spirit and independence of outlook. The primitive woman has in Ibsen's eyes, many qualities that he would like to see in his New Woman, because she is not fettered and shackled by the laws of a bourgeois society. This preoccupation with the concept of what a woman should be, as compared to the submissive and docile lot that he had seen around him since his childhood (including his own mother, who was his best example) led Ibsen to write a tragedy very early in his life, when he was an apothecary apprentice at Grimstad. The play was *Catiline* and its significance lay in the fact that here Ibsen presented women characters that were to become the prototypical pair of contrasting women that would figure prominently in the plays to follow.

CATILINE (1849-50)

The most important and noteworthy aspect of Ibsen's first play, which lay obscure till it was revised and republished in 1875, is that it shows Ibsen's preoccupation with the woman question, the contrast between two types of woman, one strong and independent, even to the point of criminality, the other comparatively weak and feminine in the conventional sense. Inspired by Sallust's Catiline and Cicero's Catilinarian orations, Ibsen gave vent to his own half-framed ideas about society and women in this play.

Set in Rome, against an archetypal Gothic setting, Catiline, the hero is

> "a tormented restless soul, torn by conflicts between his hatred of the corrupt senate, his ambition to resolve the glory of Rome, and his guilt over his own licentious life. He goes to the temple of Vesta to seduce Furia, one of the priestesses. Furia yields to him, but makes him swear to revenge the death of her sister, who drowned herself after she was abandoned by her seducer. When Catiline reveals that he himself was the seducer, Furia's love turns to hate, and in her frenzy she lets the Vestal flame go out. For this crime she is sentenced to be buried alive."[1]

Catiline goes back to his wife, Aurelia, and the two decide to migrate to Gaul (France). A friend of Catiline, who had fallen in love with Furia, rescues her and the priestess confronts Catiline with the threat of pursing him till his last day. Catiline once again yields to Furia's hypnotic charm and persuasiveness, abandons Aurelia and launches upon a rebellion

against Rome. His plans are sabotaged by his close friends and allies, and Catiline decides to put on end to his life than surrender. Ibsen now presents in the last scene a drama of love and passion that becomes a kind of tug-of-war between Furia and Aurelia with Catiline placed in the middle. Aurelia, the gentle and docile one attempts to persuade the defeated hero to flee with her to safety. Furia, the genius and image of his soul, lures him to death, honour and eternal fame. Hypnotized by Furia, Catiline stabs his wife, and then begs Furia to kill him. Furia stabs him with a dagger in his breast, promising to follow him beyond the grave. "The dying Aurelia however, appears one last time, repels Furia with the power of her love, and she and Catiline die in each other's arms, rising up to light and peace as dawn breaks."[2]

Ibsen's treatment of the contrasting pair of women is conventional. The forceful woman and her submissive opposite are respectively malevolent and benevolent. But while Ibsen drew on the universal cultural tradition that puts women into two definite slots, he did not leave the tradition as he found it. What is singular and characteristic in Ibsen's handling of the pattern he inherited is his testing of it. It is when Ibsen is his most unorthodox that he IS most himself, and as early as in *Catiline* (his first play), in his treatment of the dark, demanding woman and the fair, passive woman who is her foil, the future creator of Nora, Rebecca, Hedda, Hilda and Thea is too critical a judge of his culture's ideals and

values to accept its conventional wisdom on women.

Ibsen's unconscious attempts to find a mirror image of the New Woman leads him to explore and analyse women and the feminine culture, and Furia and Aurelia are the ancestors of all the women characters that he was to create to his last play. Like her descendants, Rebecca West, Hilda, Wangel, Rita Allmers, Furia is strongly attached to a man, yet she exists in her own right and has her own purposes. In contrast to Furia's individual identity, there is Aurelia who believes that a woman's role is to console and comfort. Aurelia lives only in relation to a man, while Furia has an identity of her own. No judgement is passed and no commentary given, but a long line of heroines cast in Furia's mould show that despite their destructive side, Ibsen must have admired such women as opposed to the weak and submissive ones that he portrayed. These contrasting pairs are: Rebecca vs Beata in *Rosmersholm,* Hiordis and Dagny in *Vikings,* Hilda and Aline in *The Master Builder,* Hedda and Thea in *Hedda Gabler,* Rita and Asta in *Little Eyolf* and Irene and Maja in *When* We *Dead Awaken.*

The Vikings at Helgeland (1858)

This play is based on a Scandinavian source, the Volsung Saga. It represents life in the primitive times. It is written in verse form and the theme is based upon the various Icelandic family-sagas. Regarding the play, Ibsen comments,

> "But I remember perfectly that the two figures of which I first caught sight were the two women, who in course of time became Hiordis and

> Dagny. There was to be a great banquet in the play, with passion rousing, fateful quarrels during its course. It was my intention to reproduce dramatically exactly what the saga of the Volsungs gives in epic form."[3]

Ibsen wrote The *Vikings at Helgeland* while he was engaged to be married to Suzannah Thoresen in the year 1858. He was inspired by his wife to be, who possessed the same qualities of mind and heart that the women of the Icelandic sagas, had. In his relentless quest for the image of a modern "New Woman" who can stand shoulder to shoulder with the men of the times, Ibsen wrote play after play in which he explored this concept and presented various dimensions of a strong-minded woman's personality. It would be this strength of mind and independence of thinking that would finally change the plight of the suppressed, downtrodden nineteenth century woman.

The action of *Vikings at Helgeland* is structured on a female centred triangle; the frustrated Hiordis continues to love one man after having dutifully married another. Hiordis wants to marry a warrior of superhuman valour, as the women in the Volsung saga prefer to marry a warrior. Hiordis swears to marry only the man who can kill the bear that guards her chamber. She finally marries Gunnar as he performs the courageous deed. But later on when she comes to know that it was Sigurd who killed the bear, she feels abased by the man's duplicity and resolves that to save her honour either she or Sigurd must die. The root cause of the whole tragedy

is the lie which Sigurd and Gunnar conspire to tell. Ibsen was very much concerned with the fact that truth is necessary as the basis for every human relation and interaction.

Hiordis, who is the main character, in the play is a prototype of the Scandinavian "Lady Macbeth" - a strong willed lady who possesses qualities of masculine strength. Hiordis married Gunnar, not because she loved him, but because he was a brave warrior, who killed the white Bear in her bower. She tells everyone about her husband's courageous deed on the night of a feast. She challenges others to mention any bravery performed by them.

Sigurd's wife Dagny reveals the secret, that she should not feel so proud of her husband as it was Sigurd who had killed the Bear and not Gunnar. Sigurd had agreed to let Gunnar take the credit for it, so that he could win her heart. As Hiordis comes to know the truth, she thinks that she was living a life based on falsehood. In her open admiration for Sigurd, Hioridis is the epitome of the bold woman, who admires powerful men.

Hiordis is depicted as a bold and courageous woman in the play. For some time she is guilty of the fact that she lives with Gunnar against the will of her father. She is not satisfied with her husband and out of frustration she wants to start a new life with Sigurd, when she comes to know that he loved her. She is a bold and independent woman. According to her "Happiness is worth a daring deed"[4] She is ambitious too as she

says, "Gunnar's roof tree is too low for me."[5]

Hiordis is projected as a tribal woman, possessive and destructive by nature. She has the courage to tell Sigurd that she wants to live with him, but she is unable to convey to her husband that she is trapped in a matchless marriage. She could not live happily with her husband and when she comes to know that Gunnar would not leave his wife for her sake, she kills him out of frustration.

Hiordis is a female warrior who is self-confident, decisive and possessed of a boundless energy. She wants to live a life of her choice. She is unwilling to yield to the fate as she says, "The cruel fates make the world, but their power is small unless they find helpers in our own hearts. Happiness is his who is strong enough to do battle with the fates."[6]

Gunnar expresses his love for Hiordis as he says, "Thy soul is strong and proud, there are times when I well nigh fear thee, yet, it is strange-chiefly for that do I hold thee so dear?"[7] He tells her that Sigurd should have been her husband as he is strong and powerful. Hiordis asks him to take Sigurd's life. Gunnar does not agree. She replies that he made her his wife through falsehood, and the five joyless years spent in this house, will be forgotten if Sigurd is killed. Gunnar tells her firmly that he would never harm Sigurd.

Hiordis is determined to kill Dagny also along with her husband. Her wild passion and strong will is reflected as she wished that Sigurd and

Dagny must die.

Sigurd tells her that man cannot change his destiny. He tells her that he and Gunnar loved her at the same time, but he killed the bear for his friend's sake and everyone thought that it was killed by Gunnar. Sigurd accepts his love for her as he says, "I crushed my new-born love for Gunnar's sake."[8]

Hiordis says that she too loves him and wants to remain by his side during two honourable deeds. But it is too late now as he cannot betray Oagny's trust. Hiordis's personality is revealed as she is adamant to be with Sigurd as she says, "Our fate no power can alter now."[9] When Sigurd tells her that they should part their ways, she becomes wild with passion and shoots an arrow towards him. Sigurd dies confessing, "Heavy has my life been from the hour I tore thee out of my own heart and gave thee to Gunnar. I thank thee, Hiordis, now am I so light and free."[10] Later on Hiordis shoots herself with an arrow.

Hiordis is a problematic character because she is aggressive and thus unfeminine. The play is Ibsen's second work, after *Lady Inger* of *Ostraat,* to be based specifically and substantially on a contrast between feminine and masculine values. The androgyny of Hiord is, who possesses virtues associated with heroic masculinity - physical courage, strength of mind and will - blurs the categories of masculine and feminine and insists on their complementarities within men and women and within the world.

Ibsen's protagonist is a strong person who is capable of doing anything despite being a woman.

The play is a crucial milestone in the development of Ibsen's thought - that love, vocation and the development of the integrated self is established here as a thematic link which would manifest itself variously in the plays to follow. Also, here Ibsen makes a clean-cut departure from the image and concept of the traditional woman -and veers towards creating a new image- that a woman IS an individual too, and little does one know what she is capable of.

Love's Comedy (1862)

The principal female character, Svanhild of *Love's Comedy,* is based, like Hiordis of *The Vikings* at *Helgeland,* on Ibsen's wife Suzannah. But while Hiordis lives for the marriage of true minds that great love engenders, Svanhild convinces her soul-mate that he can accomplish his poetic destiny only in solitude and renounces him to make a marriage of convenience.

Love's Comedy, first published in the winter of 1862, Ibsen's first play of contemporary social life, in which he ends the long resurrection and exploration of the Norwegian past, from *Vikings* times to the present, undertaken in his previous plays. The multi layered cultural past –mythical, historical and ideological, made up something of a communal unconscious

which went into shaping the modern consciousness. This would then expand into the large-scaled conflict of *Emperor* and *Galilean* and infiltrate the cycle of modern plays that followed. *Love's Comedy* also inaugurated another persistent feature of Ibsen's career: it met with outrage and intense hostility by the critics and the public who were incensed at its unnerving thesis that romantic love and conventional marriage were fundamentally incompatible. Ibsen's paradoxical rigour and romantic ardour, finally was too much for the Norway of the 1860's and the play was rejected by the theatres.

Love's Comedy contains not only a violent attack on marriage, that caused the first scandal of Ibsen's career, but on the kind of marriage Ibsen had entered into himself. The play's protagonist Falk, an iconoclastic poet, falls in love with Svanhild, believing that in their marriage her intelligence, love and strength will inspire him in his poetic labours. Ibsen once wrote to Peter Hansen on the autobiographical origins of his plays: *"The Vikings at Helgeland* I wrote while I was engaged to be married. For Hiordis I used the same model as later for Svanhild in *Love's Comedy."*[11] Ibsen goes on to write of *Love's Comedy's* hostile reception and to praise the only person who approved of it, namely, his valiant wife: "She is a woman of great character, exactly the person I need; illogical, but with a strong poetic instinct, a broadcand liberal mind, and an almost violent hatred of all petty considerations."[12]

Virtually plotless, the play consists of tirades and conversations whose subjects are a series of antitheses constructed on the central romantic opposition of freedom versus constraint love/marriage, vocation/security, the present/the future, the self/ the world. Falk is a lodger in the boarding house of Svanhild's widowed mother, whose life's aim is to marry off her daughters. Falk serves Ibsen as the scourger of idols. As Ibsen wrote unabashedly in the preface of the play's second edition, "I cracked the whip as best I could over love and marriage."[13]

Ibsen's verse turns from bitter pronouncements and sharp exchanges to the lyricism of an ecstatic love poetry when Svanhild says,

"My heart was lordless when with trumpet blare,
and multitudinous song you came, its king.
The banners of my thought your ensign bear,
you fill my soul with glory, like the spring."[14]

But the lover's betrothal is brief, for in the third and final movement of the play, businessman Guldstad makes short work of their exalted plans. Arguing Falk's earlier point that marriage is an ocean of obligations and demands, is not related to love or romance, Guldstad maintains that Svanhild should marry him for emotional and financial security. When Falk tells Svanhild that their love would be everlasting, she determines that they must part, so that their love would never wither by age. Throwing her ring into the fjord, she declares the necessity of renouncing Falk in this life to

gain him forever and decides to marry Guldstad.

This resolution resolves nothing, for the play's development has simply reversed itself as Guldstad repeats to Falk the truth he told. And since the passion of Falk and Svanhild is too strong to be summarily dismissed, the question arises whether it would not have been wiser to risk rather than renounce marriage for such a love. Moreover, the marriage of Guldstad and Svanhild fails to convince as a preferable alternative to a love match. This paternalistic and rather sentimental vision of domestic contentment seems as naive as the ecstatic vows of Falk and Svanhild, a woman singularly unfitted for dependency. A young, passionate and strong minded woman will not easily be satisfied with a middle-aged fatherly protector. The play's end shows a reluctant bride who requests that her wedding be put off until autumn.

Svanhild's surrender to society's essential demand for women - a suitable marriage - is the conclusion both of *Love's Comedy* and of its important feminist *leitmotif,* Ibsen's first explicit treatment of feminist issues The play's theme suggests that marriage is the end of love and romance, as Guldstad puts it, "But love, you know, goes blindly to its fate, chooses a woman, not a wife, for mate; And marriage? Why, it is a very sea of claims and calls, of taxing and exaction, whose bearing upon love is very small."[15]

Svanhild is sacrificed to her own marriage of convenience. She does not marry, but is married off. She is an outsider in a marriage -obsessed

bourgeois society, bored and unhappy in the tea-party world of her mother's boarding-house. Ibsen gives Svanhild his own mother's dreams of being a painter and, an actress. Svanhild tried painting, she explains to Falk, but believing that she had no talent, she lost confidence and decided to go on the stage. The matter was settled when the eldest aunt forced her to take a governess' post, the only proper job for an unmarried woman.

Svanhild's story is one of failed courage and thwarted hopes. She wanted to live a life of her own, but could not do so. Her surrender to her aunts has broken her for good, and the brief engagement to the unsuitable Falk, banished from the boarding house for his criticism of its idols, marks a last, momentary revolt in her life's capitulation, Svanhild makes a proper loveless marriage with a prosperous older man. She is the spirited, intelligent woman, who is brainwashed into a marriage of convenience. She wanted to break free and now stands alone. In her alliance with Guldstad, Svanhild struggles against married ladyhood, and, as Falk predicts, in the gilded cage, the fine lady manages to survive but the woman dies. Svanhild now has all the material compacts - a beautiful home, a pretty garden and lovely silk dresses but the spirit in her has died.

Suzannath Ibsen undoubtedly agreed with Falk and his creator that marriage was a hard awakening after the romantic pleasures of courtship. She had, after all, lived through four years of poverty and worry, had experienced a difficult childbirth, and had lived with a husband struggling in

deep depression. And she must have been pleased to see herself in the intrepid Svanhild who teaches the poet the falsity of woman as muse. *Love's Comedy,* in which Ibsen wrote himself free of his naive expectations about love and feminine inspiration, and in which, for the first time, he lashed out unabashedly against a social evil, namely the marketing of women as wives, was a play after Suzannah Ibsen's own heart. But Svanhild who sends the poet Falk away, afraid to test their love against the realities of marriage, is Suzannah Ibsen's foil. For Suzannah Thoresen had married the poet; they had not lived happily ever after, as Falk and Svanhild temporarily anticipated, but they had lived, happily and unhappily, and had come through together. When Ibsen wrote that *Love's Comedy* was the full expression of the urge towards freedom his marriage had given him, he was undoubtedly referring to the influence of Suzannah Thoresen's distrust of conventional thinking, her hatred of lies and cant, in short, her exemplary freedom of mind. The play was a tribute to the strong, free spirit of its author's wife, and this was, no doubt, one of the reasons that she approved of it. In his wife, Suzannah, Ibsen perceived the sprit of the New Woman and he creates the character of Svanhild as one which comes very close to this. Yet society, the eternal foe of woman, crushes the intrepid Svanhild to death.

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Chapter IV

Emancipation and Sacrifice

This chapter discusses two plays of Ibsen, each being a landmark not only in the history of modern drama, but also in the image of the women that they portray. While Nora of *A Doll's House* is a study in the concept of New Womanhood and emancipation, Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* comes across as the epitome of self-sacrifice and duty in marriage. At a deeper level, *A Doll's House* powerfully illustrates the truth that the notion of the two spheres, the centuries – old division of the world into his and hers that the nineteenth century made a doctrine for living was neither natural nor valid. Rather, the play focuses on the hypocrisy, waste and sheer foolishness of isolating women from the task of the world and from being an active participant in the workings of society.

The plays grouped together here for discussion are *A Doll's House*, published in 1879 *and Ghosts*, published in 1881. In *Ghosts,* the story of Mrs. Alving, unlike that of Nora, is that of a woman who also slammed the door on her husband and ran off into the night, but who was persuaded to return to the path of duty, with all its alarming consequences. Helene Alving

should not have married Alving, or returned to him, but once she did, it was her duty to desire him sexually. That she did not makes her responsible for the tragedy.

Hence we see that the picture of women that emerges in these two plays is radically different from each other. One image is that of the emancipated woman, who goes out to explore the possibilities of a life without the protection of a protector-husband, and hence to discover her self. The other is that of a woman who, forced by duty comes back to a loveless marriage, thereby crushing her individuality, her zest for living and faces a difficult life. She is saddled with a dissolute syphilis–ridden husband and later on a son, who bears the consequences of the sins of his father.

These are two in-depth studies of woman in an imbalanced male dominated world – and the psychology of each woman is revealed in a most sensitive and acute manner. Ibsen in his search for the ideal modern woman, the new woman is giving us, one after another, case–studies which leave it to us to decide what could be the role–model for women in a world that is changing-fast. We shall now study each of these plays rather closely to decipher their true meaning.

A Doll's House (1879)

The interwoven themes of A *Doll's House* recur throughout most of Ibsen's works. The specific problem of this drama deals with the difficulty of maintaining an individual personality – in this case feminine personality- within the confines of a stereotyped social role. The problem is personified as Nora, the doll, who strives to become a self-motivated human being in a women-denying man's world. The play was published in 1879, when the 'women-question' had become a very, very sore point of debate.

In his notes for the play, Ibsen writes that the background of his projected drama "is an exclusively masculine society with laws written by men and with prosecutors and judges who regard feminine conduct from a masculine point of view."[1]

The play questions the entire fabric of marital relationships, examines the development of self-awareness in the character, and eventually indicts the false values of contemporary society which denies the worth of individual personality. It deals with the problems of the social passivity assigned to women in male-dominated society. One must read and interpret *A Doll's House,* not as everybody's quest to find

out himself / herself, but, as every woman's struggle with everyman.

This preoccupation with the place of woman in society was a major theme in the late nineteenth century literature – and appeared in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* to name only a few. Ibsen too, as a writer was passionately involved in the events and ideas of his day, deeply anchored in his time as any writer, before or since, for none can escape the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which one belongs.

So it can hardly be doubted that for Ibsen as well as his readers and contemporaries, *A Doll's House* was the clearest and most substantial expression of the issues comprising the woman question. 'Havelock Ellis, who believed that Nora held out the promise of a 'new order' wrote in 1890, after witnessing a performance of *A Doll's House*:

> "The great wave of emancipation which is now sweeping across the civilized world means nominally nothing more than that women should have the right to education, freedom to work, and political enfranchisement – nothing in short but the bare ordinary rights of an adult human creature in a civilized state."[2]

Ibsen refused to be called a feminist all his life, preferring to be known as a humanist. Yet, at the same time, he was engaged in the battle for women's rights. He had little patience with people, male or female, who didn't stand up for their rights and opinions. He argued that society's rules came from the traditionally male way of thinking. He saw the woman's world as one of human values, feelings and personal relationships, while men dealt in the abstract realm of laws, legal rights and duties. In *A Doll's House* Nora can't really see how it is wrong to forge a name in order to save a life, but Torvald would rather die than break the law or borrow money. This difference in thinking is what traps Nora.

However, for Ibsen, the triumph of the individual embraces the right of women to express themselves. In the end, Nora's duty to know herself is more important than her female role.

The play *A Doll's House* created a furore in the history of drama as it was a revolutionary play, exploding nineteenth century ideals of feminine dependency. In this play the sanctity of marriage has been flouted by the playwright, as the central character Nora leaves her home, husband and children. Ibsen was not content with pleading for feminine emancipation. So he

took the offensive instead, stripping masculine egotism to the bone. Ibsen climaxed the awakening of his heroine not with the expected reconciliations of domestic drama, but by her taking a very drastic step ahead of her time: slamming the door on her husband and family. Thus did Ibsen usher in a new era signifying the importance of duty to oneself as the most sacred duty. It was the threshold for women's emancipation. When Nora's husband Torvald Helmer tells her that, before all else, she is a wife and mother, she replies that before everything else she is a rational human being. Nora, in this scene emerges strong and independent as never before.

In real life, Ibsen was inspired to write the play by the terrible events in the life of his protégée Laura Kieler, a Norwegian writer who was very successful. She wrote a sentimental sequel to *Brand* called *Brand's Daughters* and sent it to Ibsen. Ibsen replied with a letter in which he encouraged her to continue writing. She was a good friend to the Ibsens. Laura married a Danish schoolmaster called Victor Kieler. When he fell ill with tuberculosis, his doctors prescribed a warmer climate. The Kielers could not afford to travel so Laura secretly took out a loan, afraid that her volatile husband, who had a

phobia against owing money, would refuse to go if he knew about it. Victor recovered and on the way back from Italy, the Kielers stopped off at the Ibsens in Munich and Laura confided her secret to Suzannah.

When the forgery was detected, she was forced to tell her husband what she had done. He demanded a legal separation on the grounds that his wife was an unfit mother, gained custody of the children, and had his wife committed to an asylum, where she was placed in the insane ward.

Laura Kieler's story weighed greatly on Ibsen. She had done everything out of love and concern for her husband, but was treated monstrously for it. In his working notes, Ibsen writes:

> "She has committed a crime, and she is proud of it, because she did it for love for her husband and to save his life. But the husband, with his conventional view of honour, stands on the side of the law and looks at the affair with male eyes."[3]

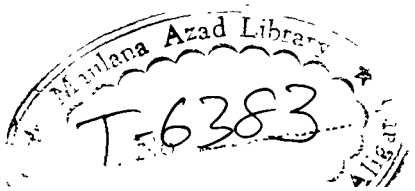
The parallels between the life of Laura and Nora are too close to ignore. The play begins with preparations for Christmas. Nora Helmer, a beautiful young wife, has been out

doing last minute shopping. This is a happy Christmas for the Helmers and their children because Torvald has recently been appointed manager of the bank. An old school friend, Kristine Linde, comes to visit Nora. Her husband's death three years ago left her penniless and she's returned to seek work. Nora promises to speak to Torvald about a job in his bank.

Nora describes a secret she has been concealing for many years. Early in her marriage, when Torvald became seriously ill, she secretly borrowed a large sum to finance a year-long stay in a warmer climate since he did not know the extent of his illness, and even if he had known, borrowing money would have been against his principles, as she says in her speech,

> "How painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly self-respect, to know that he owed anything to me! It would utterly upset the relation between us; our beautiful happy home would never again be what it is."[4]

She pretended the money was from her late father. Since then she has been struggling allowance and by secretly working at home. Nora has borrowed money from Nils Krogstad, who is a clerk in the same bank where Torvald is appointed as a manager. Krogstad tells Nora that he has written a letter to her



husband which explains the debt and the forgery. Then as he leaves, he drops it into the locked mailbox.

After reading the letter, an outraged Torvald storms out of his study, calls his wife a criminal, and accuses her of poisoning their home and their children. At this point, her fine illusions about her husband crumble down. But when a second letter arrives from Krogstad, dropping the charges and returning Nora's forged note. Torvald is relieved and immediately wants to return, Nora to the status of pet and child. But she has seen him as he really is. She realizes that she went straight from her father's house to her husband's and has never become her own person.

Torvald tries to explain to her that she has no right to neglect her most sacred duties – her duties to her husband and children Nora says, "I have other duties equally sacred; Duties to myself."[5] Torvald argues that before all else she is a wife and mother. To which Nora replies, "I believe that before all else I am a human being."[6]

Nora decides to leave Torvald's house to discover who she is. When Torvald asks if she will ever return, she replies that she could only return if the greatest miracle happened and

they were truly equals, truly married. Torvald is left clinging to this hope as his wife departs, slamming the door behind her. In the last scene of the play it is her own husband's betrayal that forces Nora to leave her home in quest of an identity.

In this play Ibsen seems to be saying that one's greatest duty is to understand oneself. At the beginning of the play, Nora does not realize she has a self. The purpose of her life is to please Torvald or her father and to raise her children. But by the end of the play, she discovers that her "most sacred duty" is to herself.

Ibsen's strong-willed heroine, Nora, is no mere case history in a suffragette bill of particulars. Far from being a typical victim of male domination, Nora is mistress of the domestic world she calls her doll's house. She has the initiative to nurse her husband through a long illness and courage to face enormous difficulties, to meet the payments on her loan. The play's turning point is based far less on Nora's supposed innocence of the realities of the world than on her husband's understandable fear of scandal in their provincial bourgeois world. Because her notion that marriage could protect her from all eventualities is shattered and because she had romantically

expected heroic sacrifices from him. Nora resolves to find some basis for her marriage other than bourgeois convention and girlish romanticism: she decides to leave her "doll's house" to seek independence in the "outside world".

A Doll's House emphasizes the relationship between husband and wife, in which the wife is under the subordination of her husband. The universality of the play does not come from its demand for truth in every human relation, but in its demand for equality in the relation between woman and man. Nora is aware of the duties to herself, rather than just taking care of home and family when she leaves her husband, the individual has triumphed over society, but at a heavy price that includes her children. In the character of Nora, Ibsen epitomizes the human struggle against the humiliating constraints of social conformity. In the third act, Nora is changed into a new woman who can think for herself and is not a doll-wife any more. In spite of Nora's uncertain future prospects, she has served in a number of countries as a symbol for women fighting for liberation and equality. In this connection, she is the most popular of Ibsen's characters. She is compulsive, highly imaginative and very much inclined to go to extreme. Nora

discovers that she has higher duties than those of a wife and mother which are duties to herself, she is going to voice the most basic of feminist principles that women too have a right and duty to develop a moral and intellectual character.

A Doll's House was the play that scandalized the nineteenth century world with its unsparing views of love and marriage, featuring one of the most controversial heroines and one of the most famous exits in the history of the stage. Ibsen's characterization of Nora shocked nineteenth–century audiences, for it suggested that the naivete and child-like impulsiveness of a middle class housewife and touchstones of the sentimental romanticism of the era were in fact part of a willful façade erected to achieve autonomy in a society in which women were virtually powerless. Nora's ultimate rejection of a smothering marriage and life in the play opened new horizons for playwrights and their audiences.

In the end, it is the truth about her marriage that awakens Nora. Although she may suspect that Torvald is a weak, petty man, she clings to the illusion that he's strong, that he will protect her from the consequences of her act. But at the moment of truth, he abandons her completely. She is shocked

into reality and feels that her relationship was unequal and therefore illusive. She becomes aware that her father and her husband have seen her as a doll-child and doll-wife respectively. Her whole life has been based on illusion rather than reality.

Nora swings between two extremes: she is either very happy or suicidally depressed, comfortable or desperate, wise or naïve, helpless or purposeful. At the beginning of the play, Nora is still a child in many ways, listening at doors and guiltily eating forbidden sweets behind her husband's back. She has gone straight from her father's house to her husband's, taking along her nursemaid to underline the fact that she's never grown up. She's also never developed a sense of self. She's always accepted her father's and her husband's opinions.

In the end she becomes aware that her father and her husband have seen her as a doll or a figure without opinion or will of her own as she says,

> "I mean I passed from father's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your taste; and I got the same tastes as you; or I pretended to – I don't know which – both ways, perhaps, sometimes one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it now, I seem to have been

> living here like a beggar, from hand to mouth. I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and father have done me a great wrong. It is your fault that my life has come to nothing."[7]

A Doll's House almost irresistibly invites sweeping generalizations. It is the first modern tragedy as Ibsen originally named it. The social dramas are descended from it. It is probably Ibsen's most striking achievement, in the sense that it changed most decisively the course of literature. The modern tragedy does not end in ruin, as Ibsen originally had intended, but in a new start. However, values are destroyed as the whole of Nora's world collapses. She grows as an individual and is purged by suffering when everything lies in ruins round her. Nora emerges strong and independent as never before, and takes the consequences of her newly gained understanding. She is in the process of becoming 'herself, at the same time she points to a freer and more honest humanity in a healthier society. She is represented as a modern, tragic heroine.

The character of Nora is very well discussed by Edmund Gosse in his illuminating essay Ibsen's "Social Dramas" wherein he places Nora in her nineteenth century context:

> "In the drama and romances of modern Scandinavia, and especially in those of Ibsen and Bjornson, the function of woman had been clearly defined. She was to be the helper, the comforter, the inspirer, the guerdon of man in his struggle towards loftier forms of existence, when man fell on the upward path, woman's hand was to be stretched to raise him, when man went wandering away on ill and savage courses, woman was to wait patiently over her spinning – wheel, ready to welcome and to pardon the returning prodigal; when the eyes of man grew weary in watching for the morning- star, its rays were to flash through the crystal tears of woman. But in *A Doll's House* he confronted his audience with a new conception. Woman was no longer to be the shadow following man, or if you will, a skin-leka attending man, but an independent entity, with purposes and moral functions of her own. Ibsen's favourite theory of the domination of the individual had hitherto been confirmed to one sex; here he carries it over boldly to the other."[8]

Nora's story is the protest against the false view that a wife should always remain under the subordination of her husband. In the final act of the play she is transformed into a mature thinking woman from a doll-wife. In the last scene of *A Doll's House* it is her own husband's deceptiveness

that forces Nora to explore their marriage, pronounce it spurious and quest for an identity.

Ghosts (1881)

The play *Ghosts* was Ibsen's answer to the questions raised after the publication of *A Doll's House*. He wrote to the Swedish Feminist Sophie Andlesparre "After Nora Mrs. Alving had to come."[9] Though the central idea of the play is the warping of individuality by hereditary weakness, the play also explores the various aspects of a marriage imposed upon a woman by society and family, and even when she realizes that she cannot live with the man and makes a bid to get out of it, she is sent back to him to act and live as a dutiful, responsible wife. It is in this context that the character of the wife, Mrs. Helene Alving is to be studied and analyzed. Once again Ibsen has sketched a very powerful character, that of a haunted woman, who in the eyes of society, failed as a wife, but he highlights also those aspects of her personality that make her, though not a role model for New Womanhood, at best a woman, who despite heavy odds can lead a dignified life. Perhaps she is just a step away from the threshold of New Womanhood for,

the last that we heard of Nora was the slamming of the door but Mrs. Alving, another woman of the modern age has stayed.

Hence our study of the play is to be from a different angle making the sufferings and tragic fate of Mrs. Alving the central theme of the play. The play opens on a note of light comedy. The wealthy widow, Mrs. Alving welcomes her son Oswald who has been away at school in Paris since his childhood. Ten years after Alving's death, she is to dedicate an orphanage in his memory. Oswald, kept innocent of his father's profligacy, returns home for the dedication. Oswald's attraction to the housemaid, Regina, in reality, his half-sister, conjures up the ghost of his parents unhappy marriage. The disastrous romance, along with Oswald's increasing symptoms of the venereal disease inherited from his father, forces Mrs. Alving to confront her own "ghosts", thereby making *Ghosts* an engrossing psychological drama.

Mrs. Alving is a development upon the character of Nora in *A Doll's House*. She chooses duty and obligation to stick through a hypocritical marriage only to realize that it made a ghastly mockery of her entire life. She is represented as the tragic protagonist of the play. She makes the tragic choice of

being guided by Pastor Mander's advice to stay on with her dissolute husband and suffers on account of this choice. But she does not give in and continues, all her life, to strive for liberation from the hell that her life has been. After the publication of *A Doll's House*, Ibsen was bitterly lambasted by critics as an advocate of free-love-labels that met his indignation Ibsen had his answer to the critics in *Ghosts* in the character of Mrs. Alving. With her conventional respect for marriage, in spite of a profligate husband, Mrs.Alving is the tragic antithesis of Nora. With each situation, Mrs. Alving's struggle seems to head towards a tragic end. By the time the final catastrophe is reached, Mrs. Alving attains a perception of the truth about life: "human life is a vale of tears."[10]

It is a different kind of tragedy whose shape is not the Mrs. Alving's quest for self-truth, but rather the manifestation of the influences of her rejecting that truth in favour of the world's demands. The protagonist does not know that she is a coward and led a life of lies for twenty eight years– but has to bear the consequences of her being and doing. The tragic action of *Ghosts* is not the search of a woman who discovers that she should have been more loving to a man she did not love, but

rather the discovery of the pollution caused by her surrender to that man- not once, but twice.

After barely a year of marriage Helene son away to Manders whom she loved and who loved her, but he sent her home to Alving because it was a wife's duty to remain with her husband later on she accuses him. "You forced me under the yoke you called duty and obligation."[11]

Mrs. Alving was bound to suffer, as she did not have initially the courage of conviction to say no to the proposal of Alving. She stays on inspite of a loveless marriage which was very common in the bourgeois homes of Europe, and bears a son, hoping that with a child things might improve but they only deteriorated, and when her husband had his way with the housemaid, Mrs. Alving became terrified that her little son would know the reality of his father. Therefore she sent him away for studies and took the responsibility of supervising the estate and handling the money while her husband was least concerned about anything. He was busy in drinking and sitting idle. He had an illegitimate daughter regime, who did not know anything about her father and stayed at the Alvings as a maid. Everything was kept secret. Oswald came from Paris for the

dedication of an orphanage built in his father's memory, always thought that his father was a very respectable man. The orphanage, the ultimate falsehood in Mrs. Alving's great life-lie, will be a final mark on the immoral past and hide the truth once and for all.

Helene Alving possesses a dual personality. Theoretically she is an emancipated woman but practically she represents the image of a suffering woman who is accepted in a conventional and orthodox society. Mrs. Alving's sacrifice brings upon her and her son nothing but misfortune. Mrs. Alving had remained trapped in a marriage of convenience recommended by her family. Her sufferings did not weaken her but on the contrary made her a confident person. She achieved a new probity. Her life which had been "a vale of tears" gave her dignity and strength. She had been battered and baffled all through her life, but still she could move with a certain assurance to achieve victory over life as she says,

> "That has been my ceaseless struggle, day after day. After Oswalds birth I thought Alving seemed to be a little better. But it didn't last long. And then I had to struggle twice as hard, fighting for life or death, so that nobody should know what sort of a man my child's father was – I had gone on

> bearing with him, although I knew very well the secrets of his life out of doors."[12]

Mrs. Alving's emancipation is a quest for her true human condition as she puts forward,

> "I had to bear it for my little boy's sake but when the last insult was added, when my own servant-maid – Then I swore to myself; This shall come to an end. And so I took the reins into my own hand- the whole control over him and everything. For now I had a weapon against him, you see; he dared not oppose me. It was then I sent Oswald from home."[13]

In the third act Mrs. Alving receives the full penalty for her guilt of substituting a sense of duty for the "joy of life". Mrs. Alving's submission to ancient social standards destroys the creative mind of her artist son and similarly destroys Regina's blooming womanhood. The "ghosts" of heredity reappear, the dead man comes back start highly to life through his son's unwitting imitation – in the pop of a wine cork, the scrape of an overturned chair, the squeal of a maid surprised by her master's sudden embrace as Oswald succumbs to syphilis and Regina goes to find her future in a brothel. The long awaited sunshine so badly needed by Oswald to continue his painting arrives only

to illuminate catastrophe. By the same token, the light of truth has come too late for Mrs. Alving to avoid the consequences of her life long deceit.

Mrs. Avling, raised as a dutiful girl, becomes a dutiful wife and mother too. However, desperate circumstances force Mrs. Alving to reassess the values she was brought up to maintain. Suffering her hard life with Alving, taking over his business, reading and thinking for herself revitalized her static intellect. By the end of the play she is able to recognize that her sanctimoniousness contributed to perverting Alving's joy of life into lechery and drunkenness. The final awakening comes too late: the ghosts of her past education have already destroyed the children in her care, Regina and Oswald. The personal tension in Mrs. Alving is based on her imposed feminine weaknesses in a society where only men expect to express themselves aggressively and self-confidently. In this way, Ibsen recalls the feminist sympathy he expressed in *A Doll's House,* and depicts another tragedy where a woman finally asserts her own individuality and intellect after catastrophe.

Mrs. Alving, with all her courage and determination, is not able to free herself and her son from the "Ghosts" of the past.

> "I almost think we are all of us ghosts, Pastor Manders. It's not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that "walks" in us. It's all sorts of dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs, and so forth. They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we can't get rid of them. Whenever I take up a newspaper, I seem to see ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sand of the sea. And then we are, one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light."[14]

Ibsen's drama is in short, an entreaty for woman's rights- not for her right to vote, but for her right to exist as a responsible member of society, "an individual", the equal and complement of man. In the dramas of modern Scandinavia, and especially in those of Ibsen, the woman's role was only that of a comforter and inspirer, but later on he confronted his audience with a new concept of womanhood. Woman was no longer to be the shadow following man, but an independent entity with the power to think for herself and her home. Ibsen is the first dramatist who loves to see his women as thinking human beings.

It would be in the fitness of things to conclude this discussion of ghosts with a very profound assessment made by George Bernard in his review of *ghosts* entitled "ghosts at the

Jubilee which appeared in the Saturday Review" (July 3, 1897). Show says that by writing his social drama's Ibsen had begun "the drama of struggle and emancipation and had declared that the really effective progressive forces of the moment were the revolt of the working classes against economic," and what vital and significant to us, "the revolt of the women against idealistic, slavery."[15]

And then in the same article he underlines the fact that Mrs. Alving is a

> "typical figure of the experienced, intelligent woman who is passing from the first to the last quarter of the hour of history called the nineteenth century has discovered how appallingly opportunities were wasted, morals perverted, and instincts corrupted, not only- sometimes not at all – by the vices she was taught to abhor in her youth, but by the virtues it was her pride and up-rightness to maintain."[16]

Mrs. Helene Alving may not be the real New Woman but she has innumerable qualities in her that one would want in a New Woman – "she is not an egotist, she is not always whining about herself, "but when pitted against heavy odds "she suffers nobly in silence and with dignity."[17], and above all she has the tenacity not to break or bend under pressure.

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Chapter V

Innocence versus Passion

Ibsen's desire to portray the New Woman took varied forms. Sometimes it asserted itself in the projection of a woman with a head-strong and passionate nature, like the protagonist in *Vikings* at *Helgeland,* at other times it was a woman upon whom the sudden and forceful realization had come that she had been treated like a doll, a mere plaything all her life, and yet at other times the image of a woman who believed that she could salvage a joyless married life by mere duty and self-sacrifice. In this onward voyage of discovering newer facets of women who can stand on their own, despite odd circumstances we have two plays, *The Wild Duck* published in 1884 and *Rosmersholm* published in 1886, that offer much insight into the subject.

The Wild Duck (1884)

Basically, *The Wild Duck* is a study in the egotism of its who principal male characters, Hialmar Ekdal, the impressionable weakling married to a strong, unimaginative woman, Gina Ekdal; and his neurotic friend, Gregers Werle,

who takes it upon himself to place Hialmar's quite amiable marriage on new foundations of truth. At the play's beginning the Ekdal household exists in a state of beneficent illusion. When this harmonious and harmless illusion is willfully destroyed by the compulsive busy body Werle, the situation of the Ekdals turns bizarre and ultimately tragic. *The Wild Duck* is a profoundly sensitive play which interweaves scorn for moralistic meddlers in people's lives with a wealth of understanding for weak, fallible humanity.

The play's central conflict is dramatized through the three leading male characters. On the one side is Gregers Werle, a self-declared champion of truth, and on the other Hialmar Ekdal, an escapist who does not wish to face the truth, and his personal theoretician, the cynical Dr. Relling. But Gregers, Hialmar and Relling are more similar than has been supposed. Each considers himself as a man with a mission and believes that life is best lived by taking stances. Gregers insists on the necessity of truth, Relling, of lies, and Hialmar greedily assimilates every experience to the life-lie of his virtuous toil. Although both Gregers and Relling consider themselves as wise

and practical, both are men with feelings whose reactions and judgements are highly emotive.

In opposition to the men's theorizing and sentimentality Ibsen places the women of *The Wild Duck*: Berta Sorby and Gina Hansen Ekdal, who make up a solid minority of sense. And the women's simple thinking, willing efficiency, and unpretentious meeting of life's demands do more than deflate the men's high-flown sentiments; they constitute a measure of judgment. Hedving, the daughter of Hialmer and Gina, caught between her mother's sense and her father's sensibility, dies a victim of Gregers' morality and Hialmar's self-pitying ego.

What Ibsen insists on is that the call of the absolute destroys human happiness and tranquility. Though life is too hard to be endured without illusion, some people's illusions, like Gregers' messianic one, become vicious and destructive because they arise out of weakness rather than strength, out of blindness to their own and other people's nature rather than out of clarity of vision. In other words *The Wild Duck* looks at the subject of truth telling through a very dark lens. Gregers Werle has avoided his father, whom he detests, by spending fifteen years in the family mining concern. Gregers is so unattractive in

appearance that he has given up all hope of marrying and having a family; instead he has become an idealist and goes about advocating and preaching a theme of truth and purity.

His father, Old Werle, has allegedly driven his sick wife to her death by carrying on love affairs in his own home. He had once had his serving girl, Gina, as his mistress. Arranging her marriage with Hialmar Ekdal, the son of his former partner, Werle also sets the couple up in the profession of photography. Hialmar is pleased with his marriage and believes that Gina's child is his own daughter. At present, Old Werle lives with his housekeeper Berta Sorby and between them there are no secrets.

Gregers Werle comes to Hialmar and explains the claim of the ideal and tries to make Hialmar see that his marriage is based on a lie. Though Gregers believes that he lives for disinterested idealism, telling people to lead lives based on the whole truth about themselves, but this is solely a veneer for a very personal motive. In revealing Gina's past to Hialmar he can rake up his hated father's supposed sexual offences and gain vengeance for his dead mother. But rather than making Hialmar happy by understanding the true nature of his marriage,

Gregers only succeeds in turning Hialmar against his daughter, Hedvig. The daughter, in order to prove her love for her father who is rejecting her, takes a pistol and kills herself. Hialmar then becomes bitterly remorseful about his behaviour.

The Wild Duck's thematic duality – reality versus idealism becomes a structural feature of the play. The female protagonist, Hedvig, the innocent victim of the tension between the two men who stand for the "lie" and the "truth" has much in common with the wild duck. Too inexperienced to recognize the shallow affection Hialmar accords her, she is happy at home, for like the wild duck who has forgotten the freedom of sky, sea and woods in captivity, she has had no contrasting experience in life to provide her with perspective on those she lives with. Moreover, since she is Gina's natural daughter, she, like the wounded bird, is an indirect present from old Werle to the Ekdals. When Hedvig realizes that her father rejects her, she plans to sacrifice the wild duck to show her love and recall his. This is her attempt to adjust to the new truth Gregers has revealed. Finding her free will offering insufficient, however, Hedvig goes one step further and kills herself. With this suicide, the wild duck and Hedvig become joined: she dies in lieu of the

bird as if to prove Gregers' warning that the wild duck, after once glimpsing the blue sky, will pine for her freedom. Hedvig, with a glimpse of the truth of her father's feelings for her, dies because she cannot bear to live with the knowledge of her origins.

The duck represents Hedvig symbolically as nobody knows where she came from. The play reflects a pessimistic touch and a strange feeling. Ibsen wants to tell his audience that no marriage can be considered complete without mutual trust and mutual confession. It is a bourgeois drama dealing with the emotions and feelings of the common people, we come across in our daily life.

Hedvig is the central female character in the play. She is an innocent and lovable child. Winsome and shy, she is very much attached to her father, Hialmar. Hialmar tells Gregers regarding her that she's on the verge of losing her eyesight and she is not aware of the fact. As Hialmar says, "Gay and careless and chirping like a little bird, she's fluttering into the eternal night to her life."[1] Hialmar is very much concerned for her eyesight as he tells her to be careful, while helping him in the photography studio.

When Hialmar comes to know that he is not her biological father, his attitude towards her changes at once. He cannot tolerate even to see the child and thinks that she does not love him truly as he puts it,

> "I have loved that child so unspeakably. I have felt so unspeakably happy every time I came home to my poor room, and she flew to meet me, with her sweet little short-sighted eyes. Oh, confiding fool that I have been! I loved her unspeakably, and I yielded myself up to the dream, the delusion, that she loved me unspeakably in return."[2]

Hedvig is a very sensitive child, and when her paternity is in question, she feels very depressed and hurt. She cannot bear the insult any more when she overhears Hialmar's statement regarding her, "It's Hedvig that stands in my way. She will blot out the sunlight from my whole life."[3] Hialmer's hatred is the cause of her suicide. When Hialmar comes to know that Hedvig is no more alive, he is unable to control himself and he repents for his indifference as he says, "I hunted her from me like an animal! [Sobbing]. I can never atone to her! I can never tell her – [Clenches his hands and cries, upwards] O thou above-! If thou art there! Why hast thou done this thing to me!"[4]

The play's central theme is the significance of truth. No matter, what the consequences are, truth should be revealed at any cost. For the common people it is difficult to endure it. They do not possess the courage to face it, and change their lives according to different conditions. Gina is another important female character in the play, who was Hakon Werle's mistress. She later on married Hialmar Ekdal. She is a very down to earth and practical woman, who takes life as it comes. She believes that life is complicated, but at the same time she has the strength and courage to face it. Whatever the circumstances, she is a perfect housewife, who is devoted to her husband and child and looks after the photography work also. She does not believe in illusions, and is able to take the reality of her own life. She can make the best use of the present times and is not concerned with her unhappy past. She is a responsible and genuine woman and she is aware of the fact that she cannot turn her back on life merely because it has treated her badly.

With her clear-headed approach to Hialmar's and Gregers' sentimental excesses, she is able to make each see how foolish and idealistic they are, and she's able to counter attack them in their duplicity and gameplans. She refuses to conform to the

hypocritical concept that the worth of a woman lies in her innocence and her virginity. She also refuses to accept that their familial relationship can be destroyed by some trivial event of the past.

Gina possesses a strong character that allows her to take a stand against Hialmar's accusations of duplicity. In the confrontation between them, when Hialmar explains that he would not have married her if he had known the truth about her, she tells her husband that silence was the best virtue in a woman. Hialmar asks her whether she had spent all her days in remorse and guilt. She replies that she was always so busy with her housework, that she forgot her old affair. She is honest and forthright in her relationships.

When Hialmar hears Berta Sorby declare, that she is always candid and that's the best thing for a woman, he tries to use this against his wife.

Hialmar: What do you say to that, Gina?

Gina: "Oh, we women are very different. Some get on best one way some another."[5]

The other female character, yet another housewife is Berta Sorby, married to Gregers Werle. She was earlier married to a horse–doctor who regularly beat her up black and blue, Berta has now put her past behind, forgiven her erstwhile husband and settled into domesticity with Gregers. She is non-interfering and easy going. Mrs. Sorby who lives and lets live, is a foil of the judgmental, inquisitive Gregers. It is she who calls into question his version of his parents marriage, in which his mother was a martyr to her husband's philandering, and confronts him with how his father had to listen lectures throughout his life. Mrs. Sorby is very helpful. She loves Hedving very much and she can always find a way out, when she wants.

In creating women characters like Gina and Berta, who belong to the not so privileged, ordinary middle class, and are doomed to be dreary housewives. Ibsen is underlining the tenacity and courage of such women to take on life and bear it with courage. They are in many ways rather unusual women – they are independent in their thinking, have their own yardstick for measuring good and bad, right and wrong and, what's more, can communicate their own point of view effectively. Gina and

Berta are certainly not women in the role of the martyred or self-sacrificing female, but rather through their straight and clear responses to situations in life and their caring and sustaining nature become symbols of the New Woman who was rising and coming into her own in the western society of the nineteenth century.

Rosmersholm (1886)

The protagonist of *Rosmersholm,* Rebecca West, is hailed as one of the most passionate and emancipated women in the plays of Ibsen. She was regarded in her times as the leading light for all the future generations of women to come, and the English writer *Cecily* Fairchild even adopted Rebecca West as her pen name Shrewd and willful, independent and free thinking, Rebecca embodies in her the typical qualities of the New Woman, and yet she destroys herself to prove her love for a man and thus embodies with a vengeance the old ideal of feminine self sacrifice.

The character of Rebecca West, was based on the life of Countess Ebba Piper, a liberal minded member of Stockholm society, who caused a furore when she fled Sweden with Carl Snoilsky, the husband of one of her own relatives. Snoilsky was

the great Swedish poet, whom Ibsen met in 1864, in Rome. The creator of Nora Helmer and Mrs. Alving was impressed by the courageous and independent minded Ebba Piper. The character of Rosmer is based on the Swedish poet, Carl Snoilsky, admired by Ibsen ever since their first meeting in Rome in 1864.

Rosmersholm is set during a time of political conflict in Norway during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Rosmers live in a graceful manor house, 'Rosmersholm' and are known as a family that is conservative, honourable and reserved. What also distinguishes Rebecca from the rest is her desire to shun any kind of merriment and joy in life. Johannes Rosmer, the central male character in the play, has recently lost his wife Beata, who, we are told, committed suicide in the mill dam just outside their house. Beata we also believe was a highly emotional person often driven to a distracted state of mind. It is in this household, overwhelmed by sadness and gloom and cold reserve, that Rebecca West makes her entry and wants to gain complete authority over it. She has filled the house with flowers and Rosmer has come alive. In the beginning, she seems to be a lively, adventurous character who yearns for independence and power. Rebecca has played to

perfection the role of the sacrificial woman. When the play opens Rector Kroll the brother of the dead Beata, is encouraging Rebecca and Rosmer to marry. He compliments Rebecca, "Do you know-it is really fine for a woman to sacrifice her whole youth to others as you have done." He also has political motives for visiting. He and some friends are countering the free thinkers and liberals with a newspaper that they have just thought. They are also trying to enlist Rosmer as the editor. Kroll's son and daughter have rebelled against his strictness and joined the liberals. Even his wife supports them. He must save the misguided public. He is shocked and appalled when Rosmer tells him how he, also, has become a liberal and wants to help people free their minds and strengthen their wills. He and Rebecca want to spread joy, because it is joy that makes man nobles.

In their first scene together, Kroll compliments Rebecca, "Do you know – it is really fine for a woman to sacrifice her whole youth to others as you have done."[6] Rebcca had realized that Rosmer with his delicate, harmonious ideas and beautiful mind can be redeemed, if only his wife Beata was got rid of; therefore she swept her away into the mill-race as fast as she

could. After Beata's suicide, there is a ray of hope in the Rosmer house as both of them are attached to one another. Rebecca is passionately in love with Rosmer, and he is totally under her influence as he puts it,

> "Even while Beata was alive, all my thoughts were for you. It was you alone I longed for. It was when you were by my side that I felt the calm gladness of utter content."[7]

The real reason for Beata's death comes out in Act II when Kroll, convinced of Rebecca's pernicious influence on Rosmer, reveals the truth about his sister's suicide. Rosmer's insistence that Beata was not sane and hence committed suicide is refuted by Kroll when he not only presents the doctor's point of view, but also reveals what Beata told him before her death that she would destroy herself so that Rosmer and Rebecca were free to live and love.

Rosmer's insistence on Beata's madness goes hand in hand with his insistence on her excessive sexual appetite – he seems to be in a way terrified of it. The irony of the situation is that later Rebecca too confesses to the incredulous Rosmer, the wild uncontrollable desire she feels for him, and Rosmer's sadness is beyond expression. He realizes to his dismay that he is living with two women desperately in love with him and

that he is sexually unaware of one and sexually terrified of the other.

Now it is Rebecca's frustration that is beyond expression. It is evident now that Rosmer considers Rebecca as only a close and intimate friend and is afraid of relinquishing his old world honour and religious traditions. Later on when people start talking regarding their living together under the same roof before marriage, he proposes to marry Rebeca, asking her to become his "second wife". The proposal is a strange one. Analysis of the proposal shows that since Rosmer cannot reconcile himself with Beata's death, he tries to erase the disturbing memories by offering Rebecca marriage. Despite his personal innocence, Rosmer's refined and introverted temperament is stricken with guilt. He knows that without the happiness of absolute innocence no man can freely lead others. His life with Rebecca is tainted. After Beata's death Rosmer is free to lead the wholly spiritual existence he longed for. He shares a platonic relationship with Rebecca, "The thing that first brought us together, and that unites us so closely – our common faith in a pure comradeship between man and woman."[8]

Rebecca is now forced to admit to herself that Rosmer has something great and worthwhile and noble to live for. She is visibly shaken by Rosmer's torment. A private visit from Kroll pushes her over the edge of her hesitancy and drives her to confession. She suffers from pangs of conscience and holds herself responsible for Beata's suicide. Hence she does not accept his proposal. At last both of them decide to end their lives in the mill-race just like Beata.

Rosmersholm is the story of a man and woman who loved each other so much that they exchanged souls. The play is about the conflicts of souls or consciences. Rebecca is depicted as a character with strong views and attitudes. She is a little bit of a Machiavellian female with firmness of determination and sureness of direction. But she ends up as a helpless victim of heredity with awakened humanity in her by a sense of guilt. Her mission of leading Rosmer to emancipation is at first motivated by selfish interests. But during the process of her efforts she undergoes a metamorphosis in which her basic instincts are purified into a higher impulse for sacrifice. She confesses her sinful and desperate role in Beata's death so that Rosmer may feel light at his guilt-ridden conscience. Even when she decides

to leave Rosmersholm she urges Rosmer to continue on his mission of ennobling people. Rebecca helps to liberate, the man she loves from conventional morality and an unwanted wife, but later on she is shackled in the very same chains she sought to break. Rebecca had stayed at *Rosmersholm* because she felt a "wild and uncontrollable passion" for Rosmer, but she does not find a lover or husband in him. Gradually she accepts Rosmer's view of life. At the end, she loses the power to act as she says, "My old fearless will has had its wings clipped here. It is crippled! The time is past when I had courage for anything in the world I have lost the power of action, Rosmer."[9] *Rosmersholm* the old manor, with its long history of honour, prestige and sacrifice she explains, has at last overpowered her. Rosmer's view of life ennobles one but it kills spontaneity and happiness. She tells Rosmer that her once robust and free conscience has been replaced by a sickly, guilt-ridden one. Rosmer's view of life too changes as he says that he no longer believes in his power of transforming anyone. His faith in himself is utterly dead, nor does he believe in Rebecca. He says that Rebecca must prove her love for him. Rosmer asks her if she has the courage to go the same way that Beata did. Rebecca is ready to give up her life for Rosmer. A woman of

powerful will and emancipated thought, she is stronger than any other character in the play. Rosmer has been powerless in her hands Rebecca pays a heavy price for her passion. She proves that no matter how noble one's ideal or lofty one's principles might be, to impose them on another human being not only violates his personality, but also removes his sense of selfhood and identity. In the play Ibsen wants to find out in much greater detail, how the spiritualist sets himself up as the supreme power and in what manner and why he goes about violating another personality. In the end Rosmer imposes his authority on Rebecca by force and thus destroys her right to choose.

Rebecca's passion is quelled by Rosmer's morality. She knows how to ingratiate herself. She possesses a mesmerizing power. One may recall Ibsen's speech to students delivered seven years before writing *Rosmersholm,* "No man can portray in his writing anything for which he does not to some degree find the model in himself."[10] In the characters of Rosmer and Rebecca we can find much of Ibsen. They reflect his own being. It is a play which reveals Ibsen in all his idealism. The play is a duel of the struggles of the spirit. Both of them have to commit suicide as it is the only way for their reunion. They could not

have married because the shadow of the dead wife would have always haunted them.

The highlight of the play is that modern thinking, new faith in religion and ethics cannot be put into old bottles. Opinions may change but the roots can never be altered, paralyzing the will. Rebeca West is one of Ibsen's most powerfully delineated characters. She yearns for power and independence. She possesses vitality and warmth. She is transformed from a passionate woman to a sacrificing personality to prove her love for Rosmer. Rebecca is a very mixed character. She is a woman with a modern outlook and emancipated thinking but she cannot tolerate the truth regarding her legitimate status and she does not reveal her real age due to her unmarried status. Deadened into inertia, de-eroticised, Rebecca has lost the power to act. Romer's attitude and belief has infected her will, and made her a slave to laws that had never mattered to her earlier. She is guilt-ridden when she says, but I am under the dominion of the Rosmersholm view of life-now that I have sinned, it is fit that I should expiate."[11]

Rebecca is in the grip of the fundamental Rosmer morality at the end of the play. She has sinned and she must expiate, to

which Rosmer replies, "There is no judge over us and therefore we must do justice upon ourselves."[12]

References:

1. *Seven Famous Plays*, op. cit., p. 207.
2. Ibid, p. 273.
3. Ibid, p. 272.
4. Ibid, p. 277.
5. Ibid, p. 250
6. Ibid, p. 289
7. Ibid, p. 338
8. Ibid, p. 329-330
9. Ibid, p. 356
10. Harold Clurman, *Ibsen*. The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, p. 144.
11. *Seven Famous Plays*, op. cit., p.364.
12. Ibid, p. 364.

Chapter VI

The Bold and the Individual

The Lady from the Sea and *Hedda Gabler* mark a new phase in Ibsen's dramatic writings. Now we witness Ibsen as a non-polemical playwright, and in the works of this period social criticism and political issues gradually take a backseat. *The Lady from the Sea* is a fantasy play published in 1888, delicate as a fairy tale with the little sea-maiden, of Hans Anderson's imagination. The central character Ellida Wangel represents the view that freedom combined with responsibility leads to the right direction. The other play, *Hedda Gabler,* is a high point in Ibsen's creative life. Although the social dramas of his prose period depict full-bodied and believable characters, Ibsen achieved a psychological depth in *Hedda Gabler* that his other works never surpassed. Having investigated the feminine character in a male-oriented society in *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts,* Ibsen enlarged his field of scrutiny to encompass the full pathology of the social female. Although *Hedda Gabler* is an example of perverted feminity, her situation illuminates what Ibsen considered to be a depraved society, intent on sacrificing to its own self-interest the freedom and individual expression of its most gifted members.

The Lady From The Sea: (1888)

A woman called Magdalene Thoresen, influenced the portrait of

Ellida Wangel, the protagonist in the play. Magdalene experienced a mysterious love affair with an Icelander just like Ellida. In the early drafts of the play Ibsen called his heroine Thora, which suggests a connection with Magdalene Thoresen. Ellida's daily swims directly recall the habit of Magdalene who continued her sea-baths into her seventies. Ibsen originally called his play *Havfruen (The Mermaid).* Ellida, the central character of the play loves the man she marries out of duty, but she is haunted by memories of a Finnish seaman whom she wed years before when he tossed their rings into the sea.

The daughter of a lighthouse keeper, Ellida is married to a widower, Dr. Wangel, who has two daughters, named Bolette and Hilde. He isolates Ellida within his household, allowing her no responsibilities. She loses her first born and only child and from that time she suffers from a mysterious depression. Though she loves her husband, she pines for the sea. As Wangel says, "But a plunge into the sea is sheer delight to her."[1]

Ibsen places Ellida between two opposing men. She loves Dr. Wangel out of duty but the thoughts of the Finnish sailor always fascinate her, whom she met before her marriage. She was depressed after the death of her baby, whose eyes were just like the sailor's eyes. Dr. Wangel's decision to move near the sea frightens Ellida and she tells him about the sailor, who wooed her with marvellous descriptions of the beauty of the sea and its creatures. One day, her sailor-lover told her that

he had killed his captain in self-defence and he was forced to leave. He told her that they should be wedded to the sea and so he flung their rings into the deep sea and after that he left her. Ellida confesses all this to her husband. Later in the play the Finnish man comes back to claim her. Dr. Wangel tells him that he is there to defend her. Ellida tells her husband that he can keep her with him, but he cannot have hold on her desires and thoughts. Later on Wangel tells her that she can choose her own path in perfect freedom. Ellida is astonished and asks him if he means it with all his heart. Wangel tells her that he has given her the right to choose between the two of them out of his sheer love for her. Ellida is now free to choose her path. She changes her decision at once and tells the stranger that she would not go with him. Ellida feels happy to come back to Wangel of her own free will. She tells Arnholm, the schoolmaster, that now she has become a land creature. She says that human beings can acclimatize themselves in freedom and responsibility. Ellida, proves to be a symbol of one of Ibsen's powerful and independent women when she tells her husband that,

> "you can keep me here! You have the means and power to do it. And you intend to do it. But my mind, all my thoughts, all the longings and desires of my soul-you cannot bind these! They will rush and press out into the unknown that I was created for, and that you have kept from me.[2]"

Ellida's passion for the sea and sea creatures, her attraction towards

the strange man, were actually the expression of an awakening and growing desire for freedom and nothing else. She is called *"The Lady from the Sea"* because of her love for the sea. She seems to be mysterious because she wants to elope with the sailor and talks of seals and dolphins. Ellida comes across as a bundle of contradictions. She is poetic by nature. She is a courageous and emancipated woman, who can assert herself in a relationship; On the other hand she does not accept wifely duties towards her husband nor can she be a loving mother to her step-daughters. She lives in an imaginary world and possesses a determination in her decision as she speaks regarding the stranger, "I must speak to him myself. I must make my choice of my own free will, you see."[3]

She is a strong-willed character. Lost in the thoughts of the sailor to whom she considered herself betrothed, she does not care for Dr. Wangel as his daughter Bolette says about her, "She is incapable of doing everything that her mother did so well. There is so much she doesn't see, or that she won't see, or doesn't trouble about."[4]

The play has a mystical quality in it. The attraction of Ellida towards the stranger is a novel idea. She is a fusion of strange and strong individuality. Ellida does not bang the door like- Nora. She lives for many years with a strange man and chooses to remain as a second wife in a marriage of convenience. But after six years she talks about that sailor and says that she does not like the idea of staying with a man she does not love. She is not

attached to her step-daughters too, as she puts it, "Here, at home, there is not one single thing that attracts me and binds me. I am so absolutely rootless in your house, Wangel. The children are not mine - their hearts, I mean never have been."[5]

The play highlights the importance of living one's life on one's own terms. The theme of the plays is the psychological development of an idle woman who has nothing particular to occupy her life. In the confrontation between the stranger and Wangel, each man stakes his claim on the woman he believes is his. The stranger says that Ellida belongs to him because of the half-betrothal to her, while Wangel insists that the lighthouse-keeper's daughter is his alone. Ellida regards herself as a dependent wife, but when the stranger tells that if she goes with him she would have to come of her own free will, she is transformed into a mature and strong individual and wants to live her life with a freedom of choice. Fearing that keeping Ellida by force will drive her into madness, Wangel abruptly releases her from their contract. It is a miracle cure; she says that it changes everything as the stranger who has come home from the sea, and who returns to it again was like a dead man to her. Ellida is no longer attracted to him. Wangel is astonished at this transformation and tells her, "I am beginning to understand you little by little. You think and conceive in pictures. Your longing and aching for the sea, your attraction towards this strange man, these were the expressions of an awakening and growing desire for freedom - nothing

else."[6]

Wangel no longer treats his wife as a possession but as a free human being. Accommodation, born out of love, overcomes the past and enables the couple to begin again. Freedom combined with responsibility changes Ellida. The sea is associated with freedom, unknown distances, constant movement, openness of mind and adventure. The play presents, a central doctrine of Ibsen's belief that without responsibility there can be no valid meaning in freedom. The "miracle" which Nora hoped for, takes place in this play. Wangel observes that if he insists on continuing the marriage, Ellida is deprived of a choice, she cannot be a true companion or mate.

Dr. Wangel had promised Bolette that she could go for higher studies, but his attitude changes when his wife dies. Bolette becomes her father's housekeeper and she takes care of her younger sister Hilda. The arrival, of Arnholm, provides her with a ray of hope. She loves her father but at the same time she believes that she could not sacrifice her whole life for him; "I have a duty towards myself, too."? She says, echoing Nora, Bolette's marriage of convenience is for her self-development as she wants to achieve her dream of learning. She too will learn to acclimatize herself as free yet and responsible.

Ibsen began the drama of the individual with the play "*The Lady from the Sea*" that would by and large characterize the rest of his plays that follow. "What seemed to matter to him now were particulars rather

than generalities; his attention was addressed to private dilemma rather than public abuse, to what was individual and personal rather than typical or representative."[8] *The Lady from the Sea* is the dramatization of the life of individual women, refusing or reinscribing the narrow identities society assign them.

Ellida insists that her husband nullify their marriage when she realizes that she has sold herself to him. The miraculous rebirth of the Wangel's marriage through the husband's recognition of his wife's autonomy is a very strong indicator of the changing concept of womanhood.

Hedda Gabler (1890)

The character of Hedda was based on a woman Ibsen knew in Munich by the name of Alberg. She committed suicide by taking poison. Hedda bears a striking resemblance to the same woman. The play's dramatic action is the final development of the life indicated by the play's title, the last two days of a cornered woman's increasingly futile effort to live a life she despises and her consequent decision to end it.

In the beginning of the play we come to know that Hedda has married into a world not familiar to her. The talk between Juliana and George Tesman shows that it is a morality play in which virtue wins over the evil. Aunt Juliana is a paragon of the self-sacrificing womanhood of the nineteenth century who devotes her life to a male relation. Hedda

does not appreciate the idea of Aunt Juliana's visit to her house. She moves away gently, when the old aunt embraces her. She hates marital duties. She represents an unconventional character by denying motherhood. She is placed between two opposing men, Loveborog and Tesman. The former is creative while the latter emerges as ordinary and unimaginative. Hedda is seen as a loveless and cold woman in the play. She is incapable of loving anyone or possessing tender feelings. Her actions are destructive as she burns Loveborg's manuscript. *Hedda Gabler* is the study of a spiteful woman of evil instincts. She resolutely changes the fates of others in order to fulfill her own dream of freedom and independence. Thea Elvsted, Hedda's old schoolmate, and aunt Juliana, both are foils to Hedda, They are portrayals of women who submit to their socially-imposed feminine roles and derive satisfaction from their lives. Thea is an example of the nineteenth century womanly ideal, the devoted companion who helps a man in his work, while Juliana has raised George Tesman who becomes a promising academician, and now that the nephew has grown up, she takes care of her invalid sister. The selfless paragons, Juliana Tesman and Thea Elvsted, have no self; they are sentimentalists who represent the image of an ideal, sacrificing woman; they are domestic angels as compared to Hedda. Hedda does not want to live for anyone, but for herself.

Ibsen's Hedda is an aristocratic but spiritually hollow woman devoid of redeeming virtues. She remains selfish, envious and in protest against

others, happiness. Her feelings of anger and jealousy towards a former schoolmate and her ruthless manipulation of her husband and an earlier admirer leads her down a destructive path that ends abruptly with her own tragic demise. Hedda is an icon of a typical selfish and dominating woman. She runs away from the responsibilities of married life and is bored in the company of one and the same person as expressed in the following conversation between Hedda and Judge Brack:

"Hedda : Yes, of course, and no doubt when its your vocation- But I ! Oh, my dear Mr. Break, how mortally bored I have been.

Brack : Do you really say so? In downright earnest?

Hedda : Yes, you can surely understand it ! To go for six whole months without meeting a soul that knew anything or our circle, or could talk about the things we are interested in.

Brack : Yes, yes - I too should feel that a depravation.

Hedda : And then, What I found most intolerable of all-

Brack : Well?

Hedda : Was being everlastingly in the company of – one and the same person-

Brack : [with a nod of assent]. Morning, noon and night, yes- at all possible times and reasons.

Hedda : I said "everlastingly".

Brack : Just so. But I should have thought, with our excellent

Tesman, one could-

Hedda : Tesman is – a specialist, my dear judge.

Brack : Undeniably.

Hedda : And specialists are not all amusing to travel with. Not in the long run at any rate.

Brack : Not even – the specialist one happens to love?

Hedda : Faugh – don't use that sickening word !"[9]

Hedda Gabler is a play about an aggravated and ruthless woman, As in *A Doll's House,* this play describes a society that sacrifices to itself freedom and individual expression. It opposes the true self-expression of Hedda as a woman and Loveberg as a creative spirit. It approves of Aunt Juliana's mothering self-sacrifice and George's mediocrity and elevates to positions of authority men like Judge Brack, a manipulator, who hardly cares for people.

To Ibsen, self-knowledge was very important. One should not be forced into a mould by society or family, nor should one drift aimlessly through life. Identifying one's own uniqueness and special needs is a preliminary to a productive life. Although Hedda is aware of her inner conflicts, it can be argued that she never finds a true self.

The problem of Hedda illuminates the universal problem of woman in a society created and built by men. Like Nora Helmer, Hedda must make an independent decision about her life. Women, however, in all but the

most progressive societies, are barred from participating in the world outside their families. Thus, Hedda despite a profound craving for independence, has no personal resources with which to realize self-responsibility. Not having any positive influence in the world, Hedda can only define herself negatively. She destroys what she cannot accept. Undermining her husband with her coldness, denying her pregnancy, destroying Thea's lifework, burning Loveborg's creative product, ruining the child manuscript and finally, committing suicide, are all perverted attempts to satisfy her "craving for life". By depicting the tragic end of a frustrated woman in the play Ibsen declares his most powerful protest against the double-standards of society. The protagonist finds an outlet for her frustration in the form of destruction. *Hedda Gabler,* however, with its emphasis on individual psychology, is a close scrutiny of a woman, like Nora Helmer or Mrs. Alving, who searches for personal meaning in a society which denies freedom of expression. *Hedda Gabler* is a study in nullity. Hedda is a character without any motive. She is a serpent portraying beguiling coldness. She is more masculine than feminine. Hedda is a complete perversion of womanhood. Hedda has been characterized as an example of the "New Woman" but as aimless, a bourgeois, grimmer counterpart of Nora Helmer, a doll turned monster. She is the idle emancipated woman and what she is to do with her emancipation, the devil only knows.

Hedda is a strong-minded unwomanly woman, married to a passive

man. She is a woman without any tender feelings. The title of the play is significant as Ibsen wrote in a letter to Moritz Prozor,

> The title of the play is *Hedda Gabler.* My intention is giving it this name was to indicate that Hedda as a personality is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife. It was not really my intention to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions and human destinies, upon a ground work of certain social conditions and principles of the present day.[10]

Hedda rejects womanhood. She has nothing to do for herself and spends her time meddling in other people's lives. She sees beauty in destruction and considers suicide as a courageous action. She says, "it gives me a sense of freedom to know that a deed of deliberate courage is still possible in this world - a deed of spontaneous beauty."[11]

Hedda burns Loveborg's manuscripts. She is a loveless woman. She neither loves her husband nor does she reciprocate the advance of her admirer, Brack. Hedda is unable to give herself to Loveborg. She cannot help a man, create, either biologically or intellectually because she desires to allocate the masculine role to herself.

Placed in similar crisis as Ibsen's other heroines, Hedda faces an impasse in her life. Sharing Nora's craving for freedom and Mrs. Alvings compliance with social conventions, Hedda finds no outlet for her personal demands; she is constantly torn between her aimless desire for freedom and

her commitment to standards of social appearance. Refusing to submit to her womanly destiny, Hedda has such an unsatisfied craving for life that she is incapable of being emotionally involved with others.

When Nora of *A Doll's House* recognized her own unsatisfied needs, she left her husband and children. Considering that her most "sacred duty" was to find herself, she left home to discover her personal worth through facing life's experiences before being able to relate to others. Like Nora, Hedda is a stranger to herself. Lacking Nora's daring and defiance of conventions, she is unable to undergo the trials of self-evaluation and becomes a morbidly self-vindictive, destructive virago, capable only of striking out against the successful socially conforming individuals who rep resent an implicit reproach to her uninformed cravings. In the play, Ibsen provides enough information to show how Hedda's problem is the product of her special background. Instead of preparing his daughter for wifehood or motherhood, General Gabler taught her to ride and shoot, skills symbolic of the military mystique which became for Hedda the basis of her fascination with the violent and the romantic. Unable to recognize the demands of her individuality, she remains enslaved to a standard of social conventionality and can only admire from far the forbidden world where there is freedom of expression and an inhibited exuberance of life. Loveborg provides Hedda with the vicarious experience of an individual who enjoys an unfettered creative life. She draws sustenance from his

soul's outpourings as he tells her of his dreams, his work and his excessive way of life. When Loveborg makes serious demands on her, Hedda rejects him. George Tesman, on the other hand is an acceptable husband especially because he makes no demands on Hedda's emotional incapacity. Posing no threat to her internal security, he is able to provide her with material security and to indulge her taste for luxury and an active social life.

Hedda is trapped by society. She does want to live a daring, creative life but is afraid of society's condemnation. Her fear of scandal is due to her father's military background, with its emphasis on discipline and conformity to rules. She wants to possess power and have control over destiny as she puts it, "I want for once in my life to have power to mould a human destiny."[12]

The figure of Hedda dominates the play as do those of the great individualists of the later group, and her society is important only in so far as it affects her mind and determines her thought and action. But it is not, as they are, a study of a mind's progress into self-discovery, because Hedda's mind remains the same at the end as at the beginning. Hedda refuses to discover herself, and her conflict and her tragedy is the result of this refusal. Longing for life and yet afraid of it, she refuses to admit this fear and convert the energy of the conflict into action, and so at the centre of the play, is a mind turning upon itself in a kind of vacuum. She

wants to have her influence on every individual. When Brack tries to blackmail her, she feels powerless and says, "I am in your power none the less. Subject to your will and demands. A slave, a slave then! No, I ca n not end u re the thought of that! Never."[13]

Hedda is attracted to death. Her favourite toys are her father's pistols, obvious symbols of death. Handing Loveborg one of the pistols so that he can end his life beautifully gives her a feeling of power. Her own death at the end may be her ultimate mode of self expression. At last she has had the strength to do one free and courageous action. Instead of trying to manipulate others to act, Hedda has herself finally acted. She has broken free of the conventional middle class society she despised. Her final act expresses the true aristocratic nature because it cares more about the gesture than the consequences. She has finally done something that she considers beautiful, but it is totally negative. She has never known satisfaction, never fulfilled her own nature, never acted constructively. Instead she has spent her whole life torn between fear and anger, seeking triumph, but gaining only despair. She has wasted her energy on supposed victories over others.

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Chapter VII

The Ambitious Woman

Ibsen's concept of the New Woman comes across to us in various shades and hues. So far we have seen, in the plays discussed in the earlier sections, women have been portrayed as innocent and self-sacrificing, primitive and aggressive, bold and individualistic, liberal and emancipated. In his quest for the 'real' New Woman, Ibsen created a whole gamut of female characters, many of whom were inspired by women he had met and been influenced by in real life. The exploration went on till the last days of his career, for Ibsen was subconsciously determined to present the image of women, not as self-effacing, submissive or lacking in individuality, but women who were intelligent, bold and individualistic. In an age when the status of women had become a matter of public debate, Ibsen in his own way, with out making a political issue about it, presented women in his plays who are persons in their own right and capable of handling their own life and situations.

In the plays grouped together for discussion in this section, the common thread is that both are dramas of the life of a man driven by his vocation and divided between two opposing women. *The Master Builder* and *Little Eyolf* both have a man as the protagonist but it is the

portrayal of women in these plays that is the focus of our attention, women who act as a perfect foil to these male protagonists bringing to light their own strength of character and potential.

The Master Builder (1892)

The two women created by Ibsen in *The Master Builder,* Aline, the wife of Solness and his friend Hilda, are very different in nature. Aline is suspicious and possessive. She cannot tolerate the presence of Kaia Fosli, the book keeper, in her husband's office. Hilda represents the concept of "New Woman", who is in search of individual freedom. She is youthful and is an epitome of the bold and the individual woman.

The Master Builder is usually considered to be Ibsen's most directly autobiographical work. The play's protagonist, Halvard Solness, is an extension of Ibsen himself. He is represented as a man who devotes his life for art rather than his family. The play was published in London, on December 6, 1892.

Solness is terrified of the younger generation and his attraction to the youth and vitality of Hilda Wangel, whom he calls "princess", reflects Ibsen's relations with Emilie Bardach, a Viennese girl of eighteen, for whom Ibsen inscribed a photograph of himself with the following words. "To the May sun of a September life-in Tyrol."[1] Later on Ibsen expressed his tender feelings for her in a letter to her, "However, you know that you are always and will always be in my

thoughts."[2]

Helen Raft, a young German woman who was a successful novelist and painter in her later years, influenced Hilda's character. Hildur Andersen, an accomplished concert pianist and the love of Ibsen's late years can be seen in Hilda's image who reflects youth and vitality.

Solness' guilt towards his wife, Aline, may reflect, "Ibsen's feeling that he had deprived his own wife of something by having lived so intensely and self-centeredly for his art."[3] It may be that if Ibsen felt guilty it was less because of his dogged devotion to his work, which Suzannah Ibsen overwhelmingly supported, than because of his awareness that his superbly intelligent wife had not developed her own talents, but had devoted her life to his career, But as for the claim that the Solness marriage is painfully identifiable as Ibsens' own, the wallowing in silent resentment and self-recrimination that marks the Solness marriage, bears little resemblance to the relation between the Ibsens, who, when they were displeased with each other expressed their feelings with a frankness that was notorious. And one has only to read Ibsen's letters to his wife while she was away from Oslo to see his deep affection. Hating to write letters, Ibsen writes frequently and in detail of everything his wife would want to know about: his own health, news of friends and family, the household affairs, the arrangements for his daily meals and

their menus, the state of the Ibsens' financial investments, negotiations of his plays and the weather. Very solicitous of Suzannah's poor health, he is worried when he does not hear from her and relieved when he does" "How happy and reassured I am to hear that so far everything has gone well! I hope it will continue to do so."[4]

The Master Builder is the drama of an artist who has to live with the idea that there is a price for everything, a destiny or providence, but who does not have the energy to live. It is the drama of a man who sacrifices the relationship with his wife and then lacks the courage to win back the territory between them.

To Solness, to build for others was the love of his life. The play opens in the office of Solness where Knut Brovik, an old man, formerly an architect, is in Solness' employment. His son Ragnar Brovik too is a draftsman in the same office, while his fiancee Kaia Fosli is a book-keeper. Solness so fears Ragnar's leaving to start his own firm that he resorts to the grotesque play of pretending to love Kaia, if she stays, so will Ragnar. Solness manipulates Kaia accusing her of wanting to desert him. She shivers with excitement, in a pathetic display of slavish love, "Oh, how good you are to me! How unspeakably good you are!"[5] His wife Aline Solness enters. She speaks rather slowly in a plaintive voice, expressing her disapproval of her husband through a double entendre of accusatory politeness, "I am afraid I am disturbing you."[6]

Hilda startles, then charms Solness with her marvellous recollection of his heroic construction of ten years ago and his even more heroic deed,

> "Oh, it was so gloriously thrilling! I could not have believed there was a builder in the whole world that could build such a tremendously high tower. And then, that you yourself should stand at the very top of it, as large as life!"[7]

Solness humours Hilda because she brings him relief from his wretchedness. Her robust physical health contrasts sharply with Aline's sickliness. Her taste for dramatic domestic architecture, her vision of homes with towers, marks her as Solness' soul mate. Hilda's faith in Solness's genius, coupled with her youth and determination, make her a perfect ally for a man who fears the loss of his powers. The relation of Solness and Hilda is characterized by an interlocking, one sided view each has of the other: the aging man's vision of the vibrant younger woman, a courageous free spirited helpmate, who will restore his failing power- complements the young woman's vision of the successful older man- a heroic father figure whose achievement will give meaning to her own life. From beginning to end, Solness and Hilda cling to the half-truth of their complementary identities, and much of the originality of *The Master Builder* lies in its partial privileging of this shared illusion.

Princess Hilda is a perfect picture of an understanding woman. The master builder, Halvard Solness, thinks himself a lucky person, to

have her as a true companion, patient in listening to his opinions and sound in giving advice. Hilda reassures him and boosts his morale by emphasizing that he has a right to build. She throws off the guilt he feels towards his wife, by telling him that he should not feel responsible for the breakdown of fire.

Solness needs a strong conscience just like Hilda that would free him of his scruples and allow him to build homes. He says to Hilda, "you are like a dawning day. When I look at you-I seem to be looking towards the sunrise."[8]

By forcing Solness to recommend Ragnar's drawings, Hilda frees him from his humiliating dependency on his subordinate and heals his sick fear. He can now let Kaia and Ragnar go. Hilda's kingdom is nothing less than the extraordinary structures the master builder longs to create, and in inaugurating the new house, he is marking out the future she is inspiring him to achieve, "You might have the top most room in the tower, Hilda-there you might live like a princess."[9]

At the end of the play Hilda stands side by side with Ragnar, not youth against youth as Solness wishfully believed, but rather youth with youth. Hilda is thrilled to see Solness at the top of the tower and cries with excitement "My-my Master Builder."[10] Solness fulfilled Hilda's vision through his death.

Hilda is imaginative and youthful. All she wants is to dream of

living in a kingdom built by Soleness. She wishes him to achieve more than he has ever been. She tries to take Solness away from Aline, just like Rebecca did in the play *Rosmersholm.* She is always lively and cheerful. Hilda represents conviction in her character as she puts it;

Hilda : My castle shall stand on a height-on a very great height-with a clear outlook on all sides, so that I can see far-far around.

Solness : And no doubt it is to have a high tower!

Hilda : A tremendously high tower. And at the very top of the tower there shall be a balcony. And I will stand out upon it.

Solness : How can you like to stand at such a dizzy height?

Hilda : Yes I will! Right up there will I stand and look down on the other people-on those that are building churches, and homes for mother and father and the troop of children. And you may come up and look on at it, too.

Solness : Is the builder to be allowed to come up beside the princess?

Hilda : If the builder will.

Solness : Then I think the builder will come.[11]

Hilda Wangel can also be interpreted as a neurotic young woman whose emotions have become twisted to the point that she seeks

destruction as beauty in itself. However, Hilda's jealousy of Kaia demonstrates the complexity of a character which previously had appeared as rather simple. At first Hilda seems idealistic and like Solness, acts as a symbol of greatness. But her jealousy suggests a more human motive. Although Hilda seems to have no interest in a love affair with Solness; she is fascinated by the anticipation of his once more performing the same thrilling act that she witnessed before.

On the surface, Hilda's character could be explained as a young woman whose greatest emotional experience so far has been to see Solness climbing the heights, and now she has come to recapture that experience. But beyond the psychological level, Hilda acts symbolically in the play. She is the projection of Solness's desire to prolong his youth and to continue in his work, building higher and higher monuments to his own glory. In the action of the play, she is the energizing force that leads Solness to his last and fatal attempt to aspire to the heights.

In sharp contrast, Mrs. Aline Solness is an extremely conservative woman who lives only for cold, unemotional duty. This is so because her past has been symbolically destroyed by the fire that took away her family home, her furnishings and other mementos of her youth. She assumes the blame for the loss of her children, since her insistence on nursing them even during her illness and fever caused their deaths. She is so controlled by dead ideas and beliefs to have any of the joy of life that both Solness

and Hilda aspire to.

The Master Builder is clearly an exploration of guilt. Solness and Aline both mask their personal guilt by telling themselves that the death of their sons was God's will, something that is not to be questioned. But Solness's guilt is also due to the realization that his actions have been damaging to other people, combined with a near paralyzing fear that he will be caused to suffer in the same manner himself. Yet he continues to perceive his own actions, his will, as something that can't be controlled. But again while *The Master Builder* centers round a male protagonist, we have the projection of Ibsen's concept of a New Woman, individualistic, bold and free- spirited in the form of Hilda Wangel as in sharp contrast with Aline who is cold and lacks vitality. The most important quality of Hilda is her vivacity and her optimism which is exemplified in her being able to help achieve the twin components of happiness, the joy of life and the joy of work- the joining of eros with vocation.

Little Eyolf (1884)

Little Eyolf is a drama where the centrality of the man fades to give place to one of the women, and the love triangle is subordinated to the action of her transformation. Rita Allmers undergoes a change of character and attitude after the death of her child Eyolf, becomes more

sensitive and caring and becomes capable of teaching her husband, a moral philosopher, the meaning of his own vocation.

Alfred Allmers, a teacher, married to a rich woman, is working on a book called "Human Responsibility". He is more attached to his half-sister Asta, than to his wife. Rita is a passionate, sensual woman who has lured Allmers into marriage by her beauty and wealth. Allmers is in a confused state of mind because of her forceful personality and he leaves Rita for some weeks to seek solitude in the mountains, to think and to write. After he returns, he has transformed completely. He declares that he will write for his lame son, Eyolf. He is no more responsive to his wife's sexual ardour. Rita is a possessive woman who wants to have a complete influence on her husband as she says, "The child is only half mine. But you shall be mine alone! You shall be wholly mine! That I have a right to demand of you!"[12] She does not want to share her husband's love with her son. And later on when the child drowns both the parents are guilt-ridden, because as an infant Eyolf had fallen down from a table, crippling him for life, while they were making love.

The other woman in the play, Allmer's half-sister, Asta rejects the proposal of marriage from Borgheim, an engineer, as she is very much attached to Allmers. But when she discovers that she is not really Allmer's sister, her devotion towards him remains as usual. Finally she

decides to marry Borgheim. Rita and Allmers decide to achieve their mission of helping the needy children with their love and care. They had neglected their child and after his death they want to share happiness with other children.

There is an unusual character, in the play, the Rat wife, who symbolizes death. She wears an old fashioned flowered dress and a black coat with tassels. She plays on her pipe to attract the rats and they follow her boat into the water and drown. Eyolf is fascinated by her and her little black dog. While playing near the fjord, Eyolf is drowned.

Allmers' sexual coldness is due to the guilt he feels about the causes of Eyolf's being crippled. Rita has lost her child and she wants to fill her loneliness through loving and caring for other children in their neighborhood. She yields to the law of change. It is play of regeneration-a flight from sensual desires to the spiritual bond, the sacred love.

In the end Rita and Allmers transform completely to perform a noble task together.

Two different aspects of woman and love are presented in the playas Rita loves Allmers as her husband, while Asta loves him as a brother. Rita is possessive while Asta is gentle and soft-spoken. Rita can never share her husband's love, neither with her sister-in-law nor with her son. Rita wants Asta to marry Borgheim, so that she would go off with him, far away. Allmers accuses her of wanting to get rid of Asta. To which she

replies that she would have him for herself alone. She is not at all reasonable and tells him, "I don't care a bit about being reasonable. I care only for you! Only for you in all the world! For you, for you, for you".[13]

When Alfred tells her about his highest mission, to be a true father to Eyolf, she does not appreciate the idea at all, as she has an obsession for her husband. She loves him to such an extent that she neglects her child. She is a selfish woman who only thinks for herself. After the death of their son, Rita and Allmers reacted differently. Allmers thinks that all his plans regarding the looking after of Eyolf are spoiled, while Rita grieves for her son, her husband and herself. The drowned Eyolf lay under the water with his eyes open and Rita is haunted by the big open eyes.

Rita is aware of the fact that she did not take good care of Eyolf, and Allmers blames his wife for his death. Rita says that Allmers too is responsible for the tragedy. She is a woman with an independent mind and does not agree with her husband. She thinks that he is wrong in his laying the entire blame of Eyolf's death on her. She feels jealous and possessive even if her husband speaks about Eyolf with love, "There, you see! The moment you mention Eyolf's name, you grow tender and your voice quivers!"[14]

Asta finds her joy in Alfred, but Rita demands to be happy for

herself. Asta had cared for Alfred since her school days. Her decision to marry, Borgheim is an attempt to bury her affection and love for Alfred through a relation with another man. As Asta remains the same, Rita changes. Eyolf's death has revealed to her the exclusionary love for Alfred that made her neglect her son. The same honest intelligence and sense of self that allows Rita to refuse her husband's reification of her, first into a "mother" then a "fatal temptress" allow her to confront her moral failing and try to redeem it. She requests Asta, whom she always considered her rival to join her and Alfred in terms that show that her demand for Alfred's complete affection has vanished along with her jealousy. As she says, "Oh Asta, I beg and implore you stay here and help us! Take Eyolf's place for us."[15] She senses a complete transformation in herself as the conversation between Rita and Allmers represents,

Rita : There is a change is me now – I feel the anguish of it.

Allmers : Anguish?

Rita : Yes, for change, too, is a sort of birth.

Allmers : It is a resurrection, transition to a higher life.

Rita : Yes with the loss of all, all life's happiness.[16]

Like Nora, Rita has lived for a man, and like her also, she accepts her fault. When she tells Allmers that she would love other children as if they were her own, he terms it sheer madness and Rita tells him, just like Nora that she would have to educate herself for it. She further says that

she used to listen when he and Asta talked about "human responsibility" and now she wants to try herself to carry it on, in her own way. At last Rita has discovered that she has a self other then that of Alfred's sexual mate.

After the loss of his child, Alfred wants to seek solitude among the mountains. Rita is associated with temporal love, Allmers with higher duties. Their thinking reflects the difference between man and woman. A woman has feelings while a man believes in reason. The transformation in Rita occurs not from impulsiveness, but from considered reason. It is the woman who tries to bring a change in herself after analyzing her moral failing. In *Little Eyolf,* as in *The Vikings at Helgeland, Rosmersholm* and *The Master Builder,* the passionate woman directs the man towards his vocation. The play differs from its predecessors, for it is the woman who chooses the vocation as her own, and the man who follows. Formerly enchanted by Rita's beauty, the ethical philosopher is now tempted by her new state of mind and asks her if he too could join her in her noble mission. Rita wants to be with her husband, but on totally different terms from the ones she formerly insisted on.

Rita's and Alfred's project embodies Rita's not Alfred's, law of change. Her vitality and strength formerly concentrated on her passion, now express itself as a capacity to confront moral failing and a

willingness to find a way to live with it. Both the parents have resolved to live a new, a higher life, And then Allmers says about Eyolf and Asta- "Now and then, perhaps, we may still on the way through life have a little, passing glimpse of them.

Rita and Allmers have a noble mission in life, the peaks and stars reflect higher cause, which can be achieved by helping needy children.

Rita : Where shall we look for them, Alfred?

Allmers : [Fixing his eyes upon her] upwards.

Rita : Yes, yes upwards.

Allmers : Upwards – towards the peaks. Towards the stars and towards the great silence.

Rita : [Giving him her hand] thanks![17]

In the character of Rita, Ibsen is presenting and affirming yet another woman who does not surrender to the harsh deals of life. We see her in the beginning as a woman blooming with vitality but in the end, even though she is a woman who has gone through a great personal tragedy she still has the courage and fortitude to go on, to live, not as she lived earlier, a life of passion, but as a woman with the capacity to overcome her failing and start a new life, more purposeful and meaningful.

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Chapter VIII

The New Woman with a Difference

This chapter includes the study and analysis of two plays of Ibsen, *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), where Ibsen portrays the New Woman, but with a difference, a new shade. Both plays have two women who are attached to the same man and in this circle move all the great passions - hate, love and self-love, pride, remorse, madness. While Ibsen's male strivers seek to fulfill their masculine role, his female strivers struggle against their feminine one. And in this, the female individual in Ibsen's drama is a modern figure in a way that the male individual is not. The Ibsenian females from Hjordis to Ella embody the modernist struggle to escape from the prison of gender. They rebel against the inferior status assigned to them.

John Gabriel Borkman (1896)

The play *John Gabriel Borkman* is a play about human relationships. Borkman loves Ella Rentheim but later on marries her sister Gunhild. He is condemned and despised by Ella for his deed. He has sacrificed her on the altar of his career. This is a portrait of an obsessional couple consumed by masculine and feminine identity. The man judges himself by his achievement, and the woman by her success

as lover, wife or mother. Borkman embodies the notion that a man's purpose in life is to strive for accomplishment in this world. Gunhild and Ella embody the accompanying notion about women, that their every thought should centre exclusively upon the male or upon motherhood.

John Gabriel Borkman, formerly managing director of a bank, was found guilty of embezzlement, and was sent to prison. When he comes out, he remains isolated in one part of his house for the rest of his life. As Mrs. Borkman puts it, "I often feel as if I had a sick wolf pacing his cage up there in the gallery, right over my head. Hark! Do you hear backwards and forwards, up and down, goes the wolf."[1]

The play's central theme is the conflict between Ella and Gunhild over the possession of Gunhild's and Borkman's son, Erhart. Ella and Gunhild embody Ibsen's familiar pattern of the gentle and strong woman. Ella is an epitome of the feminine woman while Gunhild is an epitome of the masculine woman. Ella and Gunhild are a foil to each other. The former is soft hearted while the latter is obstinate and aggressive. But as the play moves on, both the characters develop the same goal: Ella is shown to be as bent on her vengeance as Gunhild.

Like the play *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Brokman* opens with a scene between two women who love the same man. Gunhild is obsessed with her husband and son, but she feels ashamed of her husband's deed and says, "The shame that fell upon us two innocent ones. The dishonour! And

then the utter ruin tool."[2]

Gunhild is unwomanly and fiendish in most of her actions. Her hatred for her husband is so deep that she refuses to see him in the eight years since his release from prison. Gunhild's obsession with her husband's crime against her is matched by an equally powerful obsess ion with her son as her deliverer. She thinks Erhart is an avenger who shall achieve a brilliant career and thus compensate for his father's injustice to his mother and redeem the family's honour.

Ella's obsession with Erhart is seen in the following conversation with Gunhild.

Ella Rentheim	:	I want to free him from your power - your will -your despotism.
Mrs. Borkman	:	You are too late you had him in your nets all those years until he was fifteen. But now I have won him again your see.
Ella Rentheim	:	then I will win him back from you! We two have fought a life and death battle before, Gunhild - for a man's soul!
Mrs. Borkman	:	Yes, and I won the victory.
Ella Rentheim	:	Do you still think that victory was worth the winning?
Mrs. Rentheim	:	Your need look for no victory worth the winning this time either.
Mrs. Borkman	:	Not when I am fighting to preserve a Mother's power over my son!
Ella Rentheim	:	No. for it is only power over him that you want
Mrs. Borkman	:	and you?

Ella : I want his affection his soul his whole heart

Mrs. Borkman : That you shall never have in this world.[3]

Ella and Gunhild have their own personal mission regarding Erhart. Ella has convinced herself that she has a certain kind of right over Erhart, while Gunhild's desire to adopt Erhart represents a straightforward expression of her feelings. Ella takes the advantage of being financially independent when she proposes to stay with the Borkmans, but Gunhild does not agree.

Thus Ella wants to have the custody of her sister's son. Erhart is in love with a woman named Fanny Wilton, who is seven years older than him. When the sisters quarrel openly for Erhart, he can not tolerate the situation and says that he can't take this anymore.

When Erhart leaves with Fanny, the sisters' resumption of their battle reveals the force of their jealousy. They can accept his living with Fanny, but not with anyone of them. After Ella's departure, Gunhild performs a private dance to the strains of the "Danse Macabre". She voices her inner thought, saying- "Erhart! Erhart! Be true to me! Oh, come home and help your mother! For I can bear this life no longer."[4]

Act Two reveals Ella's obsession with Borkman's abandonment of her, as Gunhild is with his crime. When she meets him in his room, she reminds him of their old love. She tells him how he had deserted her and married her sister. He is a criminal in her eyes as he murdered the love-life

in her. She can never forgive him as he has betrayed her love. She says, "You have killed the love life in me. Do you understand what that means? The Bible speaks of a mysterious sin for which there is no forgiveness. I have never understood what it could be, but now I understand. The great, unpardonable sin is to murder the love life in a human soul."[5] Borkman can understand Ella's feelings and thinks that her behaviour is justified, but he tells her that he too loved her very much, but any woman can be replaced by another. Ella blames Borkman for he is responsible for her loneliness and sufferings and also for making her heartless and indifferent. He has deprived her of love, marriage and of motherhood.

Borkman and Ella are the representatives of the reductive masculine and feminine system of a dichotomously gendered world. It was Ella's dream to be the mother of Borkman's children and later on she kept his son for eight years, because his child was the only child she could mother. Ella is suffering from an illness, which was the result of a severe emotional upheaval. She knows that she will shortly die. She wants Erhart at any cost, and would make him her avenger, just like his mother. At the same time Gunhild is adamant to have him with her. She does not like the idea of her sister assuming his mother's place. Both the women present their claims.

Ella : Erhart, I cannot afford to lose you. For I must tell you, I am a lonely dying woman. Will you come and be with me to the end?

Attach yourself wholly to me? Be to me as though you were my own child-?

Mrs. Borkman : And forsake your mother, and perhaps your mission In life as well? Will you, Erhart?[6]

In the last act of the play there is a futile competition between the sisters regarding the possession of Erhart. He says that he wants to live his own life. Borkman pleads with Erhart for cooperation in re-establishing himself, but he does not help his father. He leaves his home, determined never to enter it again. The air is cold and frosty, but he moves towards a hill and Ella follows him. They arrive at a place where in the bygone days of their love, they used to meet. Borkman collapses and dies of a heart attack. Even at the moment of his death, he refutes the notion that his life's work is linked to his personal life. In the end, it is a man's work that counts and "one woman can always take the place of another, and be replaced by another."[7]

Having no work, no place within the world, Ella and Gunhild live for the private life, for the rewards of all the joy a woman should know. When Erhart and then Borkman withdraw from their lives, their consuming rivalry dies a natural death.

When We Dead Awaken (1899)

Like John Gabriel Borkman, in the play *When We Dead Awaken* too there

are two women, Irene and Maja, who are attached to the same man, Rubek. Maja is a fun loving person who cannot adjust with her artist husband, while his model Irene yearns for his love. The protagonist Professor Arnold Rubek, a sculptor, exploits the model Irene for his art, then marries another woman, Maja and when she fails to adjust with her husband, he wishes to have Irene again in his life. Women are instruments in his quest to achieve his ambition. The play's sub-title was "A Dramatic Epilogue." Ironically it happened to be Ibsen's last play.

In the first act of the play, there is a long conversation between Rubek and Maja, which leads to their marriage. Neither of them are content with each other. Maja is an adventure-loving wife who is not interested in her husband's artistic creations, but prefers the company of Ulfheim, the bear-hunter, with a wild nature. Irene longs for Rubek's love. He is forcing her into the mould of the pure woman for which she is his model. She accuses him for not reciprocating her love, to which he says,

> "I came to look on you as a thing hallowed, not to be touched save in adoring thoughts. In those days I was still young, Irene. And the superstition took hold of me that if I touched you, if I desired you with my senses, my soul would be profaned, so that I should be unable to accomplish what I was striving for -And I still think there was some truth in that."[8]

In the second act of the play Maja and Rubek reveal the incompatibility in their marriage. As Maja is aware of the fact that her

husband is fed up of this constant companionship, she tells him, "You are not a particularly sociable man, Rubek. You like to keep yourself to yourself and think your own thoughts. And of course I can't talk properly to you about your affairs. I know nothing about art and that sort of thing-And care every little either, for that matter."[9] Rubek has achieved fame and appreciation, but he feels lonely in the company of his wife, and wants to have someone who really and truly stands close to him. He looks upon Irene as a true soul-mate after years of separation, but Irene feels herself as a dead person with no desire. At last both of them walk into an avalanche, and are buried in masses of snow. Maja then rejoices with her comrade Ulfheim as she puts it, "I am free! I am free! I am free! No more life in prison for me! I am free as a bird! I am free!"[10]

Rubek feels himself responsible for his unhappy and disillusioned life. He had sacrificed everything for his art; he had ignored the love of his youth and his idealism as well. In reality he has actually betrayed his art by relinquishing these essentials. It is this tragic theme that gives Ibsen's drama its special character, the experience of missing out on life and walking slowly in a state of living death. The neglect of love is looked upon as the cardinal sin. Rubek tells Irene that he shall always remain an artist. But Irene has a totally different outlook and she calls him a poet who creates a fictitious world, neglecting the people who love him. As a young artist, Rubek had been inspired by an idealistic vision of a higher form of

existence. But later on he has turned into a disillusioned exposer of people, a man who believes he portrays life as it really is. Rubek sacrifices the happiness of his wife or the woman he loves for the sake of a personal ambition.

Irene embodies strength and spirituality in her character. Although she hates the statue because it reminds her of Rubek's rejection, she also loves it because it is a symbol of achieved honour and glory. She calls the statue their creation or child, which compensates for the real children Rubek denied her. She is hurt and accuses Rubek for taking away the beauty of a contented life as she says, "Yes, for you - for the artist who had so lightly and carelessly taken a warm-blooded body, a young human life, and worn the soul out of it because you needed it for a work of art."[11]

After Rubek's indifferent attitude, Irene turns into a lifeless woman. She becomes immune to everything around her and considers herself as a dead person. She remembers the time she modeled for Rubek with grace.

Rubek	:	And you did serve me, Irene-so gladly and ungrudgingly.
Irene	:	Yes. With all the pulsing blood of my youth, I served you!
Professor Rubek	:	That you have every right to say.
Irene	:	fell down at you feet and served you, Arnold! But you, you,-you-!
Professor Rubek	:	I never did you did wrong to my innermost, inborn nature.
Irene	:	Yes, you did! You did wrong to my innermost inborn nature.[12]

In the last act Rubek yearns for Irene and pleads with her to come to live with him but Irene tells him bluntly that their life can never be revived again as the desire to live has died in her. A woman is not infinitely replenishable. In the end Rubek accepts Irene as she is. The two lovers die together after a symbolic wedding in the misty mountains. It is significant that before death Rubek realizes his fault of accepting Irene as an extension of himself, not as an individual or as a person apart from himself. He feels content to climb up over the snow field, hand in hand with his soul-mate.

The play concludes in a rapturous pacification. It starts with the setting from the sea-level to a mountain resort to a high mountainside, marking a clear, spiritual rise. Irene's name means peace, which signifies the play's last line: "Pax Vobiscum". Ibsen ends his series of dramas of modern life with words of tranquility and benediction. Ibsen's popularity and fame reached the zenith after his seventieth birthday. His career was crowned and he wanted to close his life's work on a note of peace and harmony.

The theme of the play *When We Dead Awaken* is the interrelation between love and ambition. In *John Gabriel Borkman* and *The Vikings at Helgeland* a man's rejection of love for an ambition leads the

protagonist to utter frustration and guilt. In *A Doll's House* when Nora realizes her folly of living only for love, she leaves to find out who else she might become.

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1. *Seven Famous Plays*. op. cit., p.565.
2. Ibid, p.559
3. Ibid, p.569-570.
4. Ibid, p.580.
5. Ibid, p.598.
6. Ibid, p.612-613.
7. Ibid, p.599.
8. *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*, Volume XI, op.cit, p.372.
9. Ibid, p.391.
10. Ibid, p.428.
11. Ibid, p.410.
12. Ibid, p.370.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

A study of some of the important plays of Ibsen from the point of view of female characters and the concept of New Womanhood, allows one to arrive at certain important conclusions. The significance of Ibsen's position as a dramatist is closely related, as stated earlier, with his fearless debunking of the idols and ideals of Western culture, his revolt against much that was therein the prevailing order, and his subtle manner of putting up subjects for debate. In this regard, Ibsen was highly influenced by one of the eminent theorists of modernism - George Brandes. In his inaugural lecture in 1871, in the series that became the great comparative study, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature,* Brandes writes

> "What keeps a literature alive in our days is that it submits problems to debate. Thus for example, George Sand debates the problems of the relation between the sexes, Byron and Feuerbach - religion, John Stuart Mill and Oudhen - property, Turgenev, Spielhagen and Emile Auglier - social conditions. A literature that does not submit problems to debate loses all meaning."[1]

Brandes concluded his lecture by asserting that nothing short of a revolution could set problems right and bring society to a balance. He went on to say, "For it is not so much our laws that need changing as it is

our whole conception of society. The younger generation must plough it up and replant it before a new literature can bloom and flourish."[2]

Ibsen's mind was set thinking along these lines. In one of his letters - "What will be the outcome of this mortal combat between two epochs, I do not know. But anything is better than the existing state of affairs."[3] And coming to the point, Ibsen's representation of women in the entire gamut of his plays reflects the mortal combat between the old and the modern, because Ibsen revolts against and tries to restructure the centuries old concept of man-woman relationship and re-examines the reality of woman's role in society. It is this insistence of Ibsen on women as autonomous human beings which is the most striking manifestation of the radicalism that makes him a standard bearer of modernism.

The position of women in western society had always been gendered, as Ibsen realised as soon as he became mature and perceptive enough to analyse life and society around him. It was a state of permanently unequal relations, as psychologists call it, where women were required to develop character traits pleasing to the dominant group: submissiveness, passivity and lack of initiative. But Ibsen probes deeper. Were they really so submissive, passive or lacking in initiative? On the contrary, Ibsen shows that though the women are playing a certain role relegated to them by society, they are often forced to act in hidden or indirect ways. In *Hedda Gabler,* Hedda plays the satisfied bourgeois

woman and plots secretly to bring some meaning into her life; in *Ghosts* the businesswoman, Mrs. Alving, runs her husband's estate; in *A Doll's House,* Nora plays the role of a submissive wife and saves her husband's life without his knowing it. As long as the subordinates follow the dominant partner's View, they are considered well-adjusted. When they do not, and rebel, they are considered abnormal - the judgment of Torvald on Nora's leaving her family in *A Doll's House,* of Wangel on Ellida's new found independence from him in *The Lady from the Sea,* of Manders on Mrs. Alving's leaving her husband in *Ghosts.* Subordinates often know more about the dominants than vice-versa. Nora knows how to manage Torvald by flattering his ego, Mrs. Alving recognizes the insidiousness of Pastor Manders' moral universe, Hedda recognizes and loathes the pettiness of the Tesmans; In contrast, Torvald does not know his resourceful wife, Manders is shocked when Mrs. Alving confronts him with her liberal notions, the Tesmans have no inkling of Hedda's despair.

It is worth observing and analysing that from *Catiline* to *When* We *Dead Awaken* Ibsen consistently attacks the ideology of women as the servicing sex in various ways. First, through direct satire, secondly through disparaging portrayals of men who believe that the woman is the subservient one in the man-woman relationship, thirdly through the victimisation of women in the plays which have a female-centered triangle, and fourthly, through the valorization of the autonomous

woman over the subservient woman in the plays of the male-centered triangle.

There is a direct satirical attack on the servicing role of woman In *Love's Comedy,* where Falk insists that Svanhild must pamper and please him; in *The Wild Duck, Hjalmer* wants to be waited upon hand and foot by his working wife and daughter while he sits idle and unproductive; in *The Lady From the Sea* where Lyngstand proclaims woman to be a helpmate to man who is superior to her in all respects; and in *Hedda Gabler* we have Thea who unselfishly provides secretarial service to Lovborg and Tesman.

The fact that Ibsen looks down disparagingly on men who are stout defenders of woman's servitude as a natural consequence of her sex is best seen in A *Doll's House* in the attitude of Torvald towards Nora. Torvald constantly reiterates Nora's reason for living as her duties towards her husband and children.

In those plays where there is a female-centred triangle, Ibsen shows the servitude of women through plots of forced marriage. Svanhild of *Love's Comedy* and Mrs. Alving of *Ghosts* marry prosperous men out of family duty. Hiordis of *Vikings* desperately loves a man who gives her away to another. Ellida of *The Lady from the Sea* and Hedda Gabler marry for financial security. The consequences of such marriages are generally, unhappiness, misery, desperation and emotional instability.

It is in the other triangle in Ibsen's plays - that of a man flanked by a strong and a weak woman - that Ibsen is able to show how women can really hold their own in situations not of their choice or making. In *Catiline* and *Vikings*, for example, Aurelia and Dagny live only for their relation to a man, while Furia and Hiordis have other aims and purposes in life. In *Hedda Gabler*, Thea has a relationship of servitude -first with Lovborg and then Tesman- while Hedda prefers to face death rather than live an insignificant life as Mrs. Tesman. Similarly in *Little Eyolf* Asta lives first for only Alfred's achievements and then for Borgheim's love while Rita Allmers wishes to live for a responsible purpose. In *The Master Builder* while Aline has failed as a wife and mother, Hilda is the inspiration behind Solness. In *When* We *Dead Awaken,* Maja defines freedom as the liberty Rubek gives her to replace him with another man, while Irene rebels against Rubek's use of her.

Ibsen's concept of New Womanhood, we may safely conclude, rests on women who share common features with Furia of *Catiline*, Hiordis, Hedda Gabler, Rita Allmers Hilda Wangel, Irene and above all Nora, the active woman who has been traditionally termed 'masculine,' but according to Ibsen, is the New Woman because she exhibits individual agency and a thinking mind. Ibsen shatters the concept of dichotomous gender by peopling his plays with women who share the masculine qualities. Traditionally, to be masculine is be aggressive, adventurous, ambitious,

analytical, decisive, knowledgeable, physical, self confident, sexual, strong, successful and worldly; to be feminine is to be cooperative, expressive, focused on Home and family, gentle, helpful, intuitive, naive, nurturing, sensitive, sympathetic, tender and weak. Ibsen, in his presentation of female characters, often projects them as having qualities that belong to both the traditional definitions, in fact often leaning towards the masculine definition. It is perhaps such women that he admires and takes up to as the new modern women. In *Catiline* we have Furia who apart from her womanly charms is aggressive, adventurous decisive, self confident. Hiordis of *The Vikings* is also decisive and self confident and possessed of boundless energy. In *Ghosts* Mrs. Alving shows administrative qualities of a high degree, more than her weak husband and son or the shrewd Pastor Manders.

In *Rosmersholm;* it is Rita's sexuality and a passion for doing and achieving that puts the pale Rosmer into shade. Gina and Berta in *The Wild Duck* are strong and practical women who provide for the family and not the men. And in *A Doll's House* it is through the character of Nora that Ibsen pulls down the nineteenth century ideology of the two spheres that a woman by virtue of being naive and weak leads life in the safety and security of her home, while man by virtue of being strong has to face the world outside. Ibsen shatters this notion by showing how Torvald, the so-called worldly man, owes his life to the hidden

resourcefulness of the woman he treats as a human pet.

Ibsen's concept of New Womanhood derives from his understanding of the woman's plight in those days. He shows a woman's conflict between her prescribed, gendered identity and her individual autonomy, between what society tells her to do and what she wants to become. As early as *Vikings at Helgeland,* Ibsen projects Hiordis as a woman who despises and protests against Sigurd's treatment of her as a possession; she does not wish to be considered simply an object of desire, but has her own mission and purpose. In *A Doll's House,* Nora who has been hailed as the paradigm of the modern woman knows that her husband is not alone in defining for her the role of a wife or mother. This is what the majority says, this is what is written in books and taught by religion. She takes on the world when, she rejects this age old ideology, she revolts against the notion that her role in her life is only to serve and wait on others.

In *Ghosts,* the individualist Helene Alving is torn between the idea of life with a man of her choice or a life with a man chosen by her family - the conflict again between a woman's autonomy and free will, and what society or family prescribes for her. Helene Alving is sent to her doom when in a moment of extreme submission, she bows to the proclamation of Pastor Manders that she should go home to her lawful husband. Ibsen, in this case, shows how submission to authority can

lead to disastrous consequences. Mrs. Alving realizes the in authenticity of the received ideas governing her life, yet continues to live in authentically.

In *Little Eyolf* there is once again the dramatization of a Crisis in the life of a married couple where the woman realizes that living a life under the shadow, and only in relation to her husband, she is denying herself the dignity of a human being. Rita Allmers atones for the neglect of her own child by vowing that henceforth she will look after other helpless poor boys. An inauthentic life led by her is now to be lived authentically, her freedom now is to be tempered with responsibility and accountability. Rita Allmers in doing so asserts herself as an independent woman with a conscience.

Irene in *When We Dead Awaken* does much the same when she no longer wishes to play the muse in Rubek's life, decides not to allow him to use her. What Helene Alving could not achieve because she did not listen to her inner voice, Irene attains, because she listens to it, realises her worth and refuses to bow any more to any prescribed role in a gendered world. It is, however, ironic, that in spite of all this, she commits suicide simply because Rubek exploits her.

The struggles of Ibsen's women in a world that deprived them of full human lives dramatize a battle between worn-out doctrines and principles and the rebellious impulses of a new world beginning to be

born. Ibsen was the kind of genius commonly called ahead of his time because he saw the future in the present. These women of the end of the last century, fighting against assumptions as old as recorded time, are the fullest embodiment of Ibsen's modernism.

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2. Ibid, p.383-397.

3. *Letters and speeches,* op.cit., p. 123

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